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FEB. 1951

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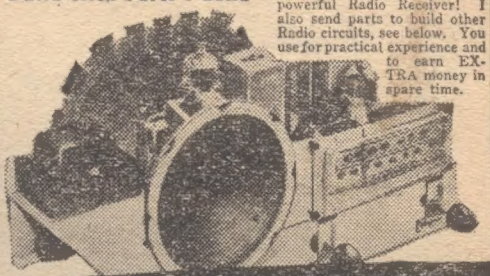
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How to Be a Success in RADIO-TELEVISION

BEST SPORTS

FEB. 1951

Vol. 2, NO. 7

Editor, R. O. Erisman

Associate, Arthur Lane

3 BRAND NEW ACTION-PACKED NOVELS

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 Could long passes carry a team, with the running game secondary? Could one man rifle that oval time after time through big, alert, powerhouse defenses, and so pile up enough score to overcome the touchdown tornadoes they'd unleash? Backfield bench-warmer Jimmy Mickle had his single-threat answer, and pigskin proof to back it!
- ★ ★ **SATAN IN CENTER (Baseball)** Ted Stratton 78
 A fighter, Al Condon was, a ballplayer who figured the way you won a game, you murdered the opposition. You blasted their pitchers out of the box. You slammed steel at their infielders every time you slid for an extra base. You poked that horsehide high up against the boards so that their outfielders killed themselves trying for it....
- ★ ★ **BIG-LEAGUE PIGSKINNER (Football)** Joe Brennan 112
 These tackles could part you from your brains, these weren't young collegians who played for the cheers of the girl friend with the pom-pom in the bleachers, they were tough married men fighting tooth and nail for groceries for the wife and kids. Against these pro pulverizers the kid would have his work cut out for him living up to his All-American grid repl!

2 HARD-HITTING NOVELETS

- ★ ★ **LAST CHANCE FOR GLORY (Baseball)** Don Kingery 48
 The boss wanted another pennant. Just like that. So all Packy Donovan had to do was take these ballplayers no other manager could handle, these outlaws and wild men, and mold them into world champions!
- ★ ★ **HOT ROD HELL (Aut racing)** Reynolds Phillips 67
 The business of wheeling a hot rod at ninety miles an hour was not in Rocky's blood—yet when that little racing roadster roared onto the track, Rocky had to admit it sent a kind of thrill up a fellow's spine...

5 THRILLING SHORT STORIES

- ★ ★ **THIS RUBE'LL BE READY! (Fight)** Richard Brister 22
 He was a hick who had to produce a haymaker, not tomorrow, now; not before the fight ended, but this round, with this next blow!
- ★ ★ **THE KING OF SWAP (Baseball)** C. Paul Jackson 31
 With a big-league scout in the stands to look him over, what Lary Goen figured he needed was a decent ball player to take his place!
- ★ ★ **BLAZING BLADES (Hockey)** Barry Kevin 38
 Of all the puck-pushers out there on the ice, why did the youngster have to decide to hero-worship Willie Titus? And just when Willie was fearfully facing-off against the bone-crushing Bearcats?
- ★ ★ **BASKETBALL BUM (Basketball)** David C. Cooke 59
 He clipped the meshes from midcourt. He laced the leather in from the sidelines. He caromed it off the backboard with one-hand heaves.—A hoop hasbeen?
- ★ ★ **WHERE THERE'S SMOKEY, THERE'S A FIREBALL** Martin S. Madancy 105
 Smokey had this pitch. It was enough: it would come hurtling at the batter's head, send him diving into the dust, and then turn around and nick the plate for a strike.....

5 GREAT SPECIAL FEATURES

- ★ ★ **SPORTS ACTION CAMERA** Herb Rogoff 98
 An inside look at the great Jim Thorpe, greatest all-around athlete of all time!
- ★ ★ **SPORTS THROBS (All Sports)** Gerard Garrett 100
- ★ ★ **SPORTS FLASHBACK** Herb Rogoff 104
 Famous double knockout on July 4, 1912. Wolgast vs. Rivers for lightweight championship of the world.
- ★ ★ **BEST SPORTS GEMS** Karp & Kantor 127
- ★ ★ **SPORTS BULL SESSION** by the Editors 129

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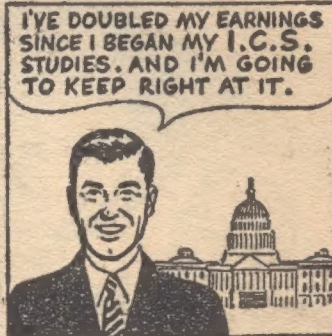
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PASS 'EM BLIND!

CHAPTER I

By **BILL ERIN**

JIMMY MICKLE sat on the bench and the anger burned inside him like something vital



and alive. The galling thing about the anger was that he couldn't say a word aloud. Probably every sub on the bench felt the way he did—that if he could only get on that field, he could do some good.

Jimmy's team, the big, glorious, powerful Bears, were behind 20-0 as the fourth quarter was getting under way. The Bears were generally regarded as an in and out team that stood a chance of upsetting the vaunted Cougars in this traditional finale of the football season. But the Cougars were everything they rated to be. Their lightning thrusts off

the T formation and their sparkling ball handling were too fast for the heavy Bears. The Cougars were every one of those twenty points better.

There was something that hadn't entered the fray, however. A Bear passing attack hadn't been unleashed. The Bears, with their single-wing power plays, had been beating their heads against a six and seven man

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Cougar line all afternoon. Georgie Hamm had done some passing, on the conventional downs in the con-

ventional parts of the field, but Georgie wasn't a sharp passer, not a really great passer, and the Cougars had known when he was going to pass anyway.

Bang-bang McNeal, whose style of

He was so mad, that when
he passed he did
a deadly job—



He was only
a backfield bench-
warmer, but he knew
that single - h a n d e d he
could have smashed all those power-

house aggregations his team was meeting—
with his good right arm, Jimmy Mickle averred, by
long - throwing the beeftrusters to death, by putting
★ ★ ★ every pass on the pinhead! ★ ★ ★

play corresponded to his nickname, had put Jimmy in with two minutes left to play in the first half when the Bears had made one of their few sallies over the mid-field stripe. But Jimmy was cold on this chilly November afternoon, and he didn't have time to get the swing of the game. When Jimmy entered the contest and the Bears went into a double-wing—what else could the Cougars expect but passes? That's what the Bears had done—passed. Jimmy had passed against insurmountable odds and with a cold passing hand. As a result he had been ineffective.

Jimmy's attention turned back to the field as the Cougars punted and the ball sailed far down the gridiron. Georgie Hamm gathered it in on the Bear twenty and came whirling back up across the chalk marks. He got away from one man, but then he was hit and brought down on the twenty-nine.

The Bears went into the single-wing. A spinner, with big John Malley hitting the Cougar line. He had a hole and he smashed six yards. Georgie Hamm sliced off the tackle for three. Malley hit the line on a power play and cracked his way four more yards up the field. First and ten.

Kenton reversed to the weak side and was stopped cold. Then it was Malley on a power play, the thing the Bears did best, and Malley banged five yards. Georgie Hamm tried to skirt the end and was spilled for a yard loss. The Bears punted.

The Cougars turned on the heat. They wanted one more touchdown. This was the final game of the season for them, and they wanted another one. They wanted to smash their big, traditional foes as badly as they could to put an exclamation point after a successful season.

Down the field they came, slicing and ripping the line, then cutting at the flanks with sharp, short passes from the T formation. Six and seven yards at a crack they relentlessly moved. With five minutes of the final quarter gone they pranced across the goal line and scored. The conversion was good and the Cou-

gars were on top, 27-0.

THE COUGARS kicked off and Georgie Hamm, tiring rapidly, stumbled back up the field to the twenty-eight. Bang-bang McNeal turned down the bench and spoke out of the corner of his mouth, his voice rasping and heavy. "Mickle," he said.

Jimmy grabbed his helmet and raced to the coach.

"Go in there for Hamm. Tell Thurpe to pass, and maybe we'll get lucky," the coach said.

Jimmy burned at the words as he raced across the field. Maybe they'd get lucky! That was McNeal's attitude toward passing. Passing was something you tried only in certain spots or when the score was big against you. Passing was something you might "get lucky" on, but then again you might not. That was how McNeal felt about passing.

To Jimmy, passing was an integral part of a modern offense. Passing was an offense in itself and was complemented by a running game.

Jimmy jerked his thumb at Hamm and took his place in the forming huddle, his figure slight and frail-looking compared with the beef-trust Bears. Jimmy was tall, thin and gangly. His big hands were incongruous and his blond hair was a close-clipped shock.

They snapped to the line of scrimmage and Thurpe cracked Malley into the line, Jimmy ahead of him in an attempt to block. Jimmy banged into his man readily enough, but he failed to move him. He got him off balance so that Malley smashed his way past by dint of brute strength. It was a six-yard gain.

"McNeal says to pass," Jimmy said to Thurpe as they went into the huddle.

"Not with second and four," Thurpe said. He called Kenton on the reverse which hadn't worked successfully all afternoon.

The burn in Jimmy grew by leaps and bounds. Thurpe was a McNeal coached player and it was a typical attitude. Why not pass with second and four? What better time to pass?

Why wait until the Cougars were expecting a pass?

Jimmy, in the tailback position, took the pass from center and headed off the end slot. He slipped the ball to Kenton coming around from the wingback spot and the ponderous half tried to reverse a fast team like the Cougars. He was smeared for a two yard loss.

Then Thurpe called a pass play off the double-wing formation, and Jimmy cursed to himself. There was no better pass formation than the double-wing, but it was also a direct tip-off to a pass play. Jimmy saw the Cougars deploying into a five man line as the Bears lined up in the double-wing.

Jimmy was mad through as the ball came back to him. He took the leather and faded as he watched his receiver. The Cougar line-men were battling to get at him. Jimmy saw Princely, the end, look back over his shoulder and he knew Princely was ready to button-hook. Jimmy had the ball cocked back by his ear and he let it go. He snapped the ball, putting it directly into Princely's middle. Princely gathered it in and was smothered by Cougar tacklers immediately. But he made seven yards and a first down.

Then Thurpe tried Malley into the line while Jimmy raged inwardly. Malley cracked for four, but a Bear was offside and they were penalized five.

Good, Jimmy thought. First and fifteen. Now Thurpe could call a pass play and his conscience wouldn't bother him for the rest of the winter.

Jimmy faded out of the double-wing and watched the ends criss-cross. They were both covered. Kenton, the short man on the play, was racing parallel to the line of scrimmage and ahead of his man. Jimmy laid the ball carefully ahead of him and led him just a little so that he was turned up-field by the time he gathered in the leather. Kenton went a few more yards before he was knocked out of bounds. A twelve-yard gain.

Jimmy wanted to pass again, but

Thurpe called Malley into the line. Malley made the first down by inches.

THAT'S THE way the Bears crept down the field. Jimmy was so mad that, when he passed, he was doing a deadly, outstanding job against great odds without even realizing it. He was putting his passes on a pin-head.

He hit for fourteen, eight, fifteen, seven, nine, as the Bears moved down the field. With the aroused Bear partisans yelling encouragement, the Bears were suddenly on the Cougar twelve, first and ten.

Thurpe called Jimmy to run out of the single-wing. Jimmy got up, limping, after making no gain. Thurpe banged Malley for two to the tenyard line. Then it was the double-wing with Jimmy fading. Jimmy missed his first pass since his entry into the game. He laid the pigskin close to the left end, but the end turned the wrong way and the defending half got a hand on it to belt it down.

Again a pass play with the whole Cougar team expecting it. Jimmy faded and the Cougar linemen came roaring at him. They were tearing at him eagerly, panting for a crack at him, waiting to tear him to shreds. Jimmy couldn't find a Bear uncovered. Suddenly he drew the ball back and ducked under outstretched arms. He wasn't much of a runner, but he turned on what steam he had and raced across the line of scrimmage. He sped down to the five and he saw Cougars coming from everywhere.

Jimmy twisted around and saw Thurpe coming from behind. "Catch," Jimmy yelled, and he tossed a short lateral to the astounded Thurpe. Thurpe bobbled it and almost lost it, but finally gained control of the ball. Jimmy threw himself into the advancing Cougars and they piled over him, three of them going down. Lying on the ground, Jimmy peeped between two Cougar legs to see Thurpe's flashing ankles race to the goal line. They were cut out from under Thurpe as soon as he got there, but he landed a good

two yards inside the double stripe for a touchdown.

Jimmy held and Thurpe booted to make the conversion good. 27-7 against them and about five minutes left in the game.

They kicked to the Cougars and the fast Cougar backfield ripped out one first down before they were forced to punt. Kenton took the punt and plowed back up-field to the thirty-five. Even Thurpe could see no logic in running line plays at this stage of the game, and Jimmy took over from the double-wing tailback spot.

Jimmy was still out to show McNeal and he paid no attention to the aches and bruises that began to infest his thin frame. He paid no attention to the fact that he was running up an amazing completion record and putting on a first class show that was worthy of an All-American. Jimmy just faded, picked out his man, cocked his arm, and whipped a pass.

His first pass was good to the forty-nine. Then he hit two short ones that carried them to the Cougar forty. The Cougars broke up two more short ones, but, on third down, Jimmy saw an end going deep and getting behind his man, so he lofted a long, soft, beautiful-to-see pass down the sideline. The end grabbed the ball on the twenty and was knocked out of bounds on the fifteen.

Jimmy pitched to the six, connected on another to the one, and then Malley bulled his way into the end zone. Once more Thurpe converted and the score was 27-14.

But McNeal had put Jimmy in the game too late. The Cougars took the kick-off and, aroused now, held on to the ball in a late drive until the gun ended the game.

Jimmy took off his helmet and ran a grimy hand through his short hair. That was all for this season. Next year, his last with the Bears, he'd come back to ride the bench again for McNeal. He wanted to play a full game, to feel a game, to keep the opposition guessing, to mix them up. That's when Jimmy knew his

passing could really be utilized.

Slowly, the fatigue catching up with him, he trotted off the field. He knew that McNeal would never see it his way.

CHAPTER II

JIMMY was innocent of the events that followed, even though he realized later that he was a key figure in them. He wasn't sure just how he came to be so important, and he certainly hadn't wanted that kind of role, but events have a way of forming themselves without the consent of individuals involved.

The underlying cause, of course, had nothing to do with Jimmy. McNeal was a gruff, burly coach of the old school who played no politics. He had made enemies among the alumni and faculty, as a result, and his last few teams hadn't backed him up with a record that would withstand criticism.

The match was put to the fire when the newspaper reports of the Cougar game came out. The newspaper men were unanimous in their opinion that had McNeal put hot Jimmy Mickle into the game earlier, there might have been fireworks. Had he used Jimmy when he still had time to mix in his power plays, the game might have had a different ending.

From there it was an easy step to point out how little McNeal had used Jimmy during the year, but how good Jimmy's record on pass completions was, how everybody had expected a great season of the Bears, and the Bears had wound up dropping three and tying one out of nine games.

The hub-bub and the clamor grew louder and louder and began to grow like a down-hill snowball gathering more snow. Before McNeal, Jimmy, or anyone else could take steps to prevent it, a faculty, alumni, student-body committee was formed to investigate the matter.

The investigation was aimless, bungling and didn't exactly do justice to McNeal. But it hadn't been

formed to do such a thing to McNeal. It had been formed to pave the way for a new coach, and in that it was outstandingly successful.

Jimmy, to his great surprise, was called as a witness. He didn't particularly want to be one. He was in a spot where he had to sympathize with the accusation placed against McNeal, but a spot where he didn't know whether or not he could ethically testify against the coach.

They goaded him into it. At first he was noncommittal and his answers came in the form of monosyllables.

"What's the matter," one of the alumni, president of a steel corporation, asked, "don't you think you're a good ball player? Don't you have confidence in yourself?"

"Sure I think I'm a good player," Jimmy returned hotly. "Sure I have confidence in myself. Didn't I do a job against the Cougars?"

"Exactly," said one of his tormentors. "Then you do agree that McNeal should have used you more often?"

"I don't know," Jimmy said, squirming. "Naturally, I think he should have."

"You do think so?" Someone else asked, as if he was suddenly in the wrong. "Why didn't he play you, do you think?"

"Because his style of attack is old-fashioned," Jimmy blurted.

"You mean the single-wing?" Someone else asked. "Some pretty successful teams used the single-wing this past year."

SO JIMMY was defending himself. "Not the single-wing," he said. "I'm talking about the pass. The pass, used off the single-wing, if that's your offense, can be just as good as off the T. Or, passing off the double-wing, if you also run plays off the double-wing, can be good. And using the pass as part of your offense, instead of just the old-fashioned, certain position passes, is necessary these days. McNeal never threw a pass until the opposition knew he had to throw one. Then he always went into the double-wing,

which was another tip-off."

"How do you account for the fact that your completion record was so good," someone else asked, "if you were always passing when the opposition knew it was coming?"

Jimmy squirmed some more. "I guess it was just good execution," he mumbled.

"Meaning that you're a much better passer than average?"

"I didn't say that at all," Jimmy replied.

"You either said that," somebody else said, "or you have no basis to accuse McNeal."

"I'm not accusing McNeal," Jimmy said. "You are."

"Do you or do you not think McNeal was wrong in not using you more often?"

"I think he was wrong," Jimmy said in desperation, because that's really what he believed.

The newspapers, of course, couldn't print everything said in one of the hearings. They merely printed the juiciest parts, and the juiciest parts were those where Jimmy heaped blame on McNeal.

Jimmy noticed, after he made his appearance before the committee, that some of the students changed their attitude toward him. There was nothing open, just a subtle change that some of them probably didn't realize themselves. Certain members of the team were outspoken in their criticism of Jimmy. Thurpe, in particular, staunchly defended McNeal and condemned Jimmy in his appearance before the committee. But Thurpe was a graduating senior and he had been thoroughly imbued with the McNeal system.

However, since it had been practically predestined, McNeal's contract was bought up and McNeal was relieved of his duties.

McNeal, before he left the campus, made it a point to see Jimmy. "Well, kid," he said in his heavy, rasping voice that now held pure bitterness, "I sure made a mistake when I called you off the bench against the Cougars."

"I'm sorry," Jimmy said, and he genuinely meant it.

"Sorry?" McNeal's broad face drew into a scowl. "It sounded like it in front of the committee," he said. "You sure made a monkey of me, calling me old-fashioned. You're just a smart-aleck kid that's sore because I didn't use you more often. Look at yourself in a mirror sometime. You'd get broken in two trying to play real football. All you're good for is to stand back there and throw a ball in the air while you pray for someone to get under it."

Jimmy's face had grown stormier and stormier. "If that isn't old-fashioned talk," he said, "I've never heard it."

"Why you little short-horn," McNeal said, "if it wouldn't make me look like a heel on every front page in the country, I'd bust you right in the nose, old as I am. But don't forget this," and McNeal waved a finger under Jimmy's nose, "if you think getting rid of me is going to get you a first-string job, you got another guess coming. I'll fix your wagon." McNeal turned sharply and strode away.

THEN STARTED the frantic hunt for a new coach to replace McNeal before spring practice started. There were rumors and counter-rumors and the second semester was well under way before the coach's name was revealed to the public. Thaddeus "Slim" Dancer was selected as the new coach.

Slim Dancer was known in the annals of the school as its greatest player. He had turned in gridiron feats that were now legends to Bear squads. He had gone into pro football and had continued to be a great player. Then he had gone into coaching. During the past season he had moved a Teachers College team through ten straight games without a loss.

Dancer, while with the pros, had learned the T system. It was the system he now coached and one reason, among others, that he was selected over several big name coaches who had been considered.

The University held a big reception for Dancer and his staff. The

football squad was there and they were presented to Dancer one at a time. Jimmy got his first look at the former Bear great.

"And *here*," said Doc Peterson, athletic director, who was making the introductions, "is Jimmy Mickle."

There was something in the way he said it that made Jimmy uncomfortable. Jimmy shook hands with the new coach and said he was glad to meet him.

"Jimmy Mickle, eh?" Dancer said. That was all he said and there was nothing in the way he said it to denote anything except that he knew who Jimmy Mickle was. But his steel-gray eyes pierced into Jimmy and seemed to be looking for something. Dancer was much too smooth, and had a civility that McNeal lacked, to indicate openly whether or not he was for or against a man. But Jimmy knew his road was going to be a rocky one.

Spring practice was a hard one for the whole team. Dancer was instituting a new system and it meant work for everybody. They spent a great deal of time in skull practice. They analyzed the T system, its advantages and disadvantages, the variations that Dancer used, and the difference in blocking and ball handling assignments. Under the T system there was a much greater reliance on the individual, but, at the same time, teamwork had to be there.

IT WAS late in the spring before Dancer began to line up teams. Jimmy, who had been a tailback under McNeal, was put in at left half. This was even more galling in view of the fact that Hamm, Kenton and Thurpe all graduated. Only Malley, the fullback, of the starting backfield, was returning for another season.

At first Jimmy thought that it had just been a temporary placement while Dancer tried his various men. But, though some of the men got their crack at the first string, Jimmy didn't. He stayed at the left half spot on the third string. He also

found, through scrimmage, that he wasn't particularly suited to the left half position. It called for blinding speed, the weight to crack a line, and a runner's agility. Jimmy had none of these. Jimmy was a passer. Under Dancer's T system, the quarterback did the passing.

It wasn't until near the close of spring practice that Jimmy got his chance. Then it was more or less an accident. The third string was running offensive plays against the first string with Jimmy doing a poor job at left half. The third string quarterback was also doing a poor job. Handling the ball, something that has to be done well by the quarterback in the T system, was being muffed by the man.

Dancer began to ride the quarterback, but the quarter continued to bungle plays. Dancer was particularly hard on the quarters because he was still trying to find a first string man for the job.

The climax came when the quarterback handed the ball directly to a first string lineman that came charging through. Dancer, who coached with a pipe in his mouth, nearly bit the stem off.

"That's all," he yelled at the quarterback. "Take a football over in a corner and practice handling it. Pete," he called to one of his assistants, "take a few men and work this quarter."

Dancer looked around for a quarterback replacement and he saw Jimmy. He called to him.

"Mickle," he said, "take that quarter slot."

Jimmy jumped into the job and found that he liked it. His big hands were made to order for fast handling of the ball and the job took agility, not speed.

Jimmy handed off nicely, faked to perfection, and kept his mind alert for following plays at the same time. Then he faded out of the quarterback slot for a pass. This was home to him. He stood calmly as the first string line charged him and picked his man. Coolly and carefully, with the deadly snap of his wrist, he laid

the ball into a receiver's arms just before he was snowed under by savage tacklers.

Jimmy passed again, and again he hit.

Dancer took his pipe out of his mouth. "All right," he said, "what's the matter with our pass defense? Look alert. Run another one of those passes, Mickle."

JIMMY faded, with the entire first string aware that a pass was coming, and calmly chose his man. He put the ball into the hands of the receiver through a host of rival defenders. Jimmy continued to pass as Dancer worked on pass defense. Jimmy was taking a pounding from the first string line but he seemed to ignore it completely and refused to be hurried. His passes weren't always complete, but they were always where they should have been.

"All right," Dancer shouted finally, "that's all for tonight. Run all the way in."

The squad started for the showers, Jimmy included.

"Mickle," Dancer shouted as he was passing the coach. Jimmy stopped. "Come here a minute."

Jimmy trotted over to the coach and they started walking slowly. "That was a good exhibition you put on tonight," Dancer said.

"Thanks," Jimmy said, and he was truly amazed. He had come to the conclusion that, where McNeal had been indifferent to him, Dancer for some reason was antagonistic.

Dancer seemed to read his thoughts. "I'll admit," he said, "that I've been a little prejudiced against you. I had a talk with McNeal before I came here, and he wasn't too kind toward you."

"I was railroaded into that testimony," Jimmy said hotly. "I was never fully quoted and it wasn't me who started the inquiry. The only thing I did was to play my best against the Cougars. Was that wrong?"

Dancer shrugged his shoulders. "I'm not interested in what was right

or wrong with that," he said. "That's past and had nothing to do with me. However, I figured you were just a mediocre passer that got hot against the Cougars when they were letting down. Then I figured you began to shoot your mouth off."

Jimmy started to protest and Dancer cut him off.

"As I say, that's past. You are, actually, a terrific passer. Maybe I shouldn't be telling you that, but I owe you an apology. You had no business playing left half, I could see that, and it should have occurred to me earlier to try you at quarter."

"I like the spot," Jimmy said frankly.

"There's a lot more to it than passing," Dancer said. "You're on your own thirty, ahead 12-7, the fourth quarter has just started, second and three. What do you do?"

"Long pass down the middle," Jimmy said promptly.

"All right," Dancer said, "you make it to their thirty-five. First and ten. What do you do?"

"Spot pass—not more than ten yards."

Dancer nodded. "Let's say you made eight. Second and two on their twenty-seven. Now what?"

"Malley into the line until we get a first down," Jimmy said.

They arrived at the shower room and Dancer stopped. He tapped his teeth lightly with the stem of his pipe for a few moments before he spoke. "From now on," he said finally, "you report with the quarterbacks." He nodded and left Jimmy.

Jimmy stood alone, his face alight with happiness. This was it. This was what he'd been dreaming of ever since he started playing football. Next fall would be his chance to show everybody who had condemned him that he was a passer and a football player and not just a bench jockey.

"Coach," Jimmy said fervently to himself, "I'm going to make you the best damned quarterback you've ever laid eyes on."

CHAPTER III

JIMMY had other people besides the coach to show that he was a football player. Jimmy had become the symbol of the reason McNeal had been given the heave-ho, and McNeal's remarks about Jimmy hadn't been nice. Now the football public and the sports writers and the alumni and everybody else wanted to see if Jimmy was as good as they, themselves, had rated him when they were after McNeal's scalp. If Jimmy wasn't good enough to cut the buck in the heavy competition, the blame for a *faux pas* would fall on his shoulders. Thus does the mind of the sports fan work.

To further complicate matters, McNeal had been named head football coach of Northern U's Wolf Pack. The Bears played the Wolf Pack as the seventh game on a nine game card. McNeal was reported to have good material at Northern and it promised to be a game played for blood. Then there were always the Cougars to consider for the finale. Practically their entire team was back.

Thus, when the Bears took the field for their first game of the season, they were an unknown quantity with a big job ahead. They were a team playing a new system under a new coach. They had the beef-trust line inherited from McNeal, but nobody knew what they had in the backfield. They had Malley at full and Mickle at quarter and the two halves nobody had ever heard of.

Dancer, however, had developed, a set of fast, slashing backs to go with the big line and Jimmy's passing.

Jimmy used his passes sparingly, but effectively. At any time, from any part of the field, he was likely to fake-off to the backs crossing him, and then fade for a pass. The potential ball carriers suddenly became knifing potential receivers and the ends were always racing deep to draw defenders with them. If, by chance or choice, one of the ends wasn't covered, it inevitably turned

into a touchdown. As a result the defense was always spread against the Bears. This left the line easy pickings for the fast and crushing backs.

It became apparent, as the Bears rolled through one opponent after another, that Slim Dancer had turned out a winner. It also became apparent that there were two teams to beat, two teams on the schedule that would apply the acid test to Jimmy Mickle and the Bears of Slim Dancer. Those two teams were the Wolf Pack of McNeal and the fast, tricky Cougars.

That Dancer was worried about the Wolf Pack was evident to Jimmy on more than one occasion. Actually, of the two teams, the Cougars posed the biggest threat and were the traditional rival. But Dancer wasn't going to worry about them until he had passed the Wolf Pack. This would be the one game of the year that McNeal wanted to win above all others.

Two days before the Wolf Pack game, Dancer took Jimmy aside.

"Frankly," he said to Jimmy, "I'm a little worried about this game."

"We'll take them," Jimmy said confidently. "We haven't really opened up with a passing attack yet."

Dancer looked a little obliquely at Jimmy. "It's not winning the game that worries me," he said. "I know McNeal and I know his type. He's old-fashioned in more ways than one. He'll be out to settle a grudge against you. And he probably realizes that the sooner he settles that grudge, the more chance his team has of winning."

Jimmy grinned. "Football is only football," he said. "I'm not afraid of a little beating."

Dancer shook his head. "I don't know what McNeal will do, and I don't know what his boys are capable of. Chances are he's got a few without too many scruples when it comes to using an elbow in a pile-up. I've got a few on this squad I could turn loose. But I wish I was sure of beating him without you, I wouldn't even play you."

"That's one thing I wouldn't like,"

Jimmy said. "You kinda forget that I've got a score to settle, too. I'd like to show Mr. McNeal just what a fathead he is."

Dancer sighed. "All right," he said, "but watch your step."

IT WAS obvious, from the opening whistle, that the Wolf Pack was out to win at any cost. They had the powerful single-wing attack of McNeal and they had some good men to make it go. More important than that, however, was their play. There wasn't a pile-up or a pass play, with Jimmy being knocked down, that Jimmy didn't feel elbows and knees. He kept himself as well protected as he could and now and then got in a judicious elbow of his own.

The Wolf Pack was not entirely undetected in their play. Twice they were penalized fifteen yards for unnecessary roughness. Once it undoubtedly cost them a touchdown.

Jimmy put on an aerial circus that had the Wolf Pack chasing their tails and the fans gasping. Never had he been more deadly. The Bears took the opening kick-off and in ten plays had scored. Jimmy hit on five straight passes, the final one for the TD.

The Wolf Pack banged back and smashed half the length of the field before they were stopped. They put a good punt out of bounds on the Bear's five yard line and Jimmy was in the hole.

Jimmy, having chosen this day to demonstrate what a great weapon the pass could be, calmly faded into the end zone and completed a pass to the right end on his own forty-five yard line. The man wasn't hauled down until he hit the Wolf Pack forty.

In five plays they were in for another touchdown.

Dancer, seeing the beating Jimmy was taking behind the line, pulled him then. Every play that Jimmy wasn't in there lessened the chances of the Wolf Pack to get him.

The rest of the half turned into bruising line play. The Wolf Pack's single-wing had a little the better of

that type of play and, just before the half ended, they managed to score. The Bears left the field at the half leading, 14-7.

Dancer realized he had to start Jimmy again in the second half. The Bears had met a line equal to their own, and, without Jimmy, they had no offense. It was Jimmy who could get over the line and spread the secondary so the runners could get around the line.

The Wolf Pack took the kick-off and banged up across the mid-field stripe in three straight first downs. There the Bears dug in and stopped them. The Wolf Pack punted and Connie Quist, a hard, fast runner, brought the ball back to the twenty-five before he was smacked out of bounds.

Jimmy faded for a pass and the alert Wolf Pack beat it down for an incompleteness. Jimmy cracked Mallev into the line and the driving full powered four yards. Jimmy tossed off to Quist going wide and Connie went up the field fifteen yards before he was dragged down. Back at the line of scrimmage they had piled up Jimmy and he came out of it with a split lip, his teeth feeling as though the Wolf Pack had used a hammer on him.

Jimmy saw red as crimson as the blood oozed out of his lip and called the same play. He tossed off to Quist and whirled with his elbow high as the lineman charged him. Jimmy caught the man full in the nose and spread the member all over his face. The man got up with blood spurting through his fingers where he held them over his nostrils.

"Just remember, big boy," Jimmy grated, "two can play at that game."

But it just added fuel to the fire and the Wolf Pack was more determined than ever to get Jimmy. The Bears had to punt finally and it put the Wolf Pack back on their fifteen yard line.

The Wolf Pack tried to slug their way out of the hole and failed. They punted and the Bears wound up on the Wolf Pack forty-eight with a first down.

Jimmy banged Mallev into the line

and then faded for the pass. The short receivers were covered, but Jimmy saw the right end out-running the safety man. Jimmy cocked his arm and lofted a long, soft pass down the field, leading his man so that the end grabbed the ball without losing stride. He kept right on going until he hit the end zone and it was another Bear touchdown.

Jimmy didn't see it. Again he was battered under by a host of Wolf Pack linemen. They pounded him to the ground and Jimmy curled to protect as much of his body as he could. There was a flurry of heeling and elbowing until they unpiled. Jimmy got up slowly and Dancer took him out.

THE BEARS converted and led 21-7. Dancer kept Jimmy out of the game until the Bears were once more on the offensive. The Bears were on their own thirty-one, first and ten, when Jimmy entered the game again.

He banged Mallev at the line, ran Quist wide, and then sneaked through for two yards himself to make a first down. That put them on the forty-two. Jimmy faded for a pass and wheeled one to the man-in-motion which was good for twelve yards. He hit the left end for fifteen and then banged one home to Mallev up close for six more. Then he faked a pass and Quist raced off tackle on a quick opening play. Quist twirled to the twenty-five for a first down.

Then it happened. Jimmy faded for a pass and couldn't find a man open. He ducked around the charging linemen and leaped into the air to float a pass into coffin corner where he saw Quist was heading. One man hit him at the shoulders and another got him at the ankles right after he got rid of the ball.

Jimmy crashed to the ground with the weight of the first man on his shoulders. The tackler at his ankles continued to roll, holding to Jimmy's ankles, and Jimmy tried to roll with him. But the weight of the man on his shoulders prevented him and he felt a tearing, searing, wrenching pain through his left leg.

Jimmy bit his lips to keep from crying out and dug his elbow as deep as he could into the stomach of the man on top of him. He got his right leg loose and kicked savagely at the man trying to tear his left leg off. Then other Wolves banged into him as they piled on. An official dove in to save what was left of Jimmy.

Jimmy tried to get up, but his left leg wouldn't hold him. It throbbed with sharp pain and there was no response to Jimmy's muscular desires.

Two of the Wolf Pack were also laid out cold and all three men had to be carried off. "Anyway," Malley said, as he deposited Jimmy on the turf in front of the bench, "you took two of them with you."

Jimmy grinned wanly. It was little consolation. It was also little consolation that Quist had gathered in the pass and scored again for the Bears. Jimmy knew his leg was badly hurt.

The Bears led 27-7 and Dancer left the field with Jimmy and the doctor. "All right," Dancer asked when the doctor had made his examination, "what's the story?"

"Well," the doctor said, "I'd like an X-ray before I say definitely, but it looks like a wrenched knee. From the way the lower leg responds, I don't think there are any broken bones."

"How much time to heal?" Dancer asked.

"Well," the doctor said, "that's hard to tell. If there's no break, with our modern heat rays we should have him walking by next Saturday. But it won't really be strong without a month's rest."

Dancer swore slowly and steadily for a full minute. Then he clamped his pipe between his teeth and strode back to the field. The Bears went on to win the game, 27-7.

CHAPTER IV

IT WASN'T until the next day, when Jimmy lay in his bed reading the Sunday papers, that he discovered what Dancer had done. Even above the headlines of the game and the stories of Jimmy's out-

standing passing exhibition was a huge caption: "WINNING COACH SLUGS LOSING COACH!"

After the game Dancer had walked across the field to meet McNeal. The Northern coach, for the benefit of the photographers, had put out his hand to shake with Dancer. But Dancer, with one clean, swift blow, had knocked McNeal colder than a mac-keral in a storage locker.

McNeal was screaming suit for assault and battery and Dancer wouldn't say anything. Nobody could get out of him why he had done it. It was comparatively easy, however, for the reporters to piece things together and come up with a fairly accurate story.

It wasn't as easy to piece Jimmy's leg together. He used a crutch most of that week and spent a great deal of time each day under the heat lamps. By Thursday he was hobbling around without the crutch, but he was definitely out of the Saturday game. Fortunately their opponent was not too strong and the Bears whacked out a 14-0 win the hard way.

Then came the Cougars and Dancer spent some anxious minutes with the doctor before they decided that Jimmy could play a limited time against the deadly team from the neighboring city. The Cougars were in their second straight season of undefeated play, and they didn't intend to let the Bears break that streak. With Jimmy comparatively inactive, the Bear's chances didn't look too good.

"The only thing in our favor," Dancer said, "is that the Cougars will play it clean. They may get to that leg of yours, but it'll be through hard tackling alone. There won't be any dirty work."

Dancer had an electric extension run to the bench on the playing field and he had a semi-tent rigged with blankets, and a heat lamp on hand. He intended using Jimmy only on offense and putting the lamp on him while the team was on defense. This was to keep the knee from stiffening in the cold November weather.

"You can stay on the training table during the first half," Dancer said.

"I won't even use you. That leg's going to stand just so much punishment and there's no use using you up early in the game."

"I'd sure like to see that first half, even if I don't play," Jimmy said. "If I'm going to run the team in the second half I'd like to see how the Cougars are operating."

Dancer thought that over and agreed that it was a good idea. So Jimmy spent the first half in the blankets on the sideline with the lamp keeping his knee limber. He watched the game closely.

It was a savage first half. The tackling and blocking was vicious and the two lines smashed together like two Sherman tanks meeting head on. But the Cougars had the offensive edge. In their senior year, the backfield was a beautiful machine to behold. They handled the ball with the artistry and smoothness of magicians and they were like greased lightning when they moved. The Bears left the field at the half trailing a great Cougar team, 14-0.

JIMMY went to the locker room with the team and Dancer took him by the arm. "How'd it look?" He asked.

"When they're sucked in for the line plays," Jimmy said, "they're wide open for passes right down the middle."

"That a boy," Dancer said, nodding his head. "You've got it."

"When I get in there," Jimmy said, "they'll spread."

"You'll have to suck them back in," Dancer agreed. "As long as they stay spread, we'll make yardage through the line. If you don't throw a pass all afternoon and they stay spread, it'll be worth it having you in there."

Jimmy nodded grimly. Two touchdowns behind and just one half to get them back. This was the acid test all right. This would tell whether Jimmy Mickle was a football player or just another flashy guy in a uniform.

So the second half started. The Cougars kicked to the Bears to open the half and Dancer kept Jimmy out of the contest until the kick was re-

turned. Quist whistled his way back to the thirty-two.

As Jimmy's lanky form trotted out onto the field, no sign of a limp in his motion, a sustained roar rose from the crowd. It was a yell of encouragement and hope at the same time.

Somehow Jimmy drew strength from that greeting. It meant that they had faith in him, that they felt he could do it. They were vindicating him and they thought that he could, with a fourteen point deficit and only half a game left, do what no other team had been able to do in two years.

Jimmy saw the Cougar defense spreading. They'd expect passes, lots of passes. But Jimmy wasn't in the last minute spot he had been a year ago. He had time to play with them now.

He banged Malley into the line and the big fullback blasted seven yards through the five man line before he was stopped. Jimmy sliced Quist off the tackle slot and the rapier-like back scooted for eight. First and ten on the forty-seven.

Still the Cougars confidently expected the pass. Jimmy lateraled off to Quist going wide and picking up the man-in-motion for interference. Quist zoomed up the sideline for twelve yards and a first down on the Cougar forty-one. The uncertain Cougars called a time out while there was a sustained roar from the Bear fans. Jimmy Mickle was in there now, and the team was a different combination. The strategy was lost on most of them, but the facts were there. The Bears were shredding the Cougars for the first time that afternoon and the Bear fans were yelling for more of it.

The Cougars crept in on defense after the time out, but they still weren't just right for Jimmy. He snapped Malley into the line for five, ripped Quist over guard for four, and pounded Malley through the middle for three and a first down on the twenty-nine.

The roar of the Bear fans was a frantic scream. The Cougar coach substituted and Cougars crept in

still farther. They were beginning to figure that Jimmy couldn't pass off the bad leg, and that's exactly what Jimmy wanted them to think.

ONE MORE, Jimmy thought, and then we'll pound home the clincher. He smashed Malley at them again and the big full was good for four solid yards. The secondary really moved in, then.

Jimmy called a play that sent the left end cutting in front of the safety man and the right end racing down the sideline for pay dirt. It worked like a charm. The safety man sucked in a little, anyway, and when he saw Jimmy fading he frantically covered the left end. The right end was all alone down the sideline. Jimmy calmly lofted one to the goal line and the right end gathered it in as he crossed the double stripe.

Jimmy was hit and hit hard by the charging Cougar linemen, but the roar of the crowd told him the story. The Bears had scored.

Dancer took him out and Jimmy limped just a little as he went back to the bench. The ovation of the crowd was music to his ears.

The Bears converted and were behind only 14-7. But the Cougars went insane. They opened up their bag of tricks after taking the kick-off, and up the field they came. Relentlessly they moved with lightning precision. The ball was everywhere and nowhere. With the same ease and magic that Jimmy had moved for a touchdown, the Cougars moved back. The Bears couldn't stop them and they were over for a touchdown. They converted and once more the Bears were behind by fourteen points.

The Bears received and returned to the thirty-five. Once more Jimmy entered the game and once more met the wave of noise that was a welcome mat to him.

Jimmy banged Malley, then Quist, and then Malley into the line for a first down. Then he faked the hand-off and faded for the pass. He hit the man-in-motion, who had cut back to the middle, with a pass right down the alley to the Cougar forty-five. He

smashed Malley the needed two yards for another first down.

He pitched two more down the middle, one incomplete and one good for twelve yards to the thirty-one; then shredded the Cougar line with thrusts by Malley and Quist. The Bears were on the twenty with a first down.

Then Jimmy faded out of the hole with no fake and his line let the whole eager Cougar line through. They charged him like madmen, but Jimmy tossed a little blooper over their heads to Malley on the old screen pass. Malley went all the way to the eight before he was stopped.

Jimmy knew the defense would get tough now. He cracked Malley and Quist at the line for only two yards each. Then he tossed one to the man-in-motion in the flat and he was belted out of bounds on the one foot line.

Jimmy took the ball from the center and dove between the center's pumping legs for a touchdown.

Jimmy came out of the game as the score went 21-14 and the Cougars started retaliation proceedings. He lay in his blanket with the welcome heat soaking into his now hurting knee and watched the deadly Cougars move. They banged across the mid-field stripe as the third quarter ended.

On the first play of the fourth quarter a Bear lineman got in the middle of the Cougar hocus-pocus and belted a ball carrier to the ground for a four yard loss. Then the Cougars drew a five yard penalty for too much time. It was second and nineteen and in two plays they savagely ripped fifteen yards, but they were still four yards short. They punted.

THE GODS of fortune, a moment ago favoring the Bears, swung the other way on that punt. The ball rolled dead on the three.

Jimmy was up and running into the game before Dancer could stop him. Jimmy felt the Cougars would draw in tight for the line smashes, and faded right back to the goal

posts before pitching a long, long one up the field. But the Cougars had scouted his strategy against the Wolf Pack and the safety man covered the end to knock the ball down.

Jimmy tried it again, and again it was incomplete. The Cougars spread wide, then, looking for the third desperation pass. Jimmy faded, but as he did so he handed-off to Malley. Quist cleaned out the hole and the full-back roared right up the field to the twenty-four before he was hauled down.

Jimmy heaved one home down the middle to Malley for eight yards, and then bootlegged Quist wide for five more. They were out of the hole and moving again. There were no longer sensible human beings in the stands, there were only screaming football maniacs.

Jimmy pelted Malley and Quist at the line to suck the defense back in, then shot one home to the left end down the middle for ten yards.

The Cougar coach was running a steady stream of men in and out of the game to try and stop the Bears, but the Bears were hot and roaring. The whole team had caught fire and they were playing their football without regard for life or limb.

Jimmy, on the last pass, had taken another beating from the Cougar linemen and his knee had twisted a little as he went down. He came up limping badly and called time while he rode out the pain. Dancer paced restlessly up and down in front of the bench, but he didn't take his eyes off Jimmy as the quarterback shook it off.

Time was called back in and Jimmy took his position behind the center. He knew the knee was getting bad fast and it wouldn't be long before it would no longer hold his weight. But he couldn't hurry things. He had to keep mixing them up. He'd have to gamble on the leg holding him.

Patiently he cracked Malley and Quist into the line, alternating them on four plays, as he waited for the Cougar secondary to creep back in. Eventually they did. They had to or they'd never stop the pounding Bear backs.

Then Jimmy faded. He went back and back as he watched his ends cross through the safety man. The Cougar had to gamble and followed the right end. Jimmy hit the left end for a touchdown.

Jimmy got up from under three Cougar linemen and limped wearily off the field. His leg felt as though it were afire now and he put very little weight on it as he hobbled off.

The all-important extra point was good and Bear rooters started to demolish the stadium in their ecstasy. The score was tied, 21-21.

Jimmy lay prone under his blankets and lamp and didn't even watch as the Cougars fought back. Jimmy knew that if the Cougars scored again, with time running out, the Bears would never win. There wasn't that much left in Jimmy's leg.

He lay on his back and concentrated on letting the healing rays soak into his leg. He heard the screaming thousands in the stands, the yells of his teammates and the crack and spat of leather and flesh on the field as the Cougars relentlessly moved once again.

THEIR GAINS were shorter against a striving Bear line, but they were gains nevertheless. Sometimes it was a foot and sometimes it was two yards, and once it was only by inches, but they were making first downs.

Jimmy opened his eyes and saw that the Cougars had moved into Bear territory. He closed them again. Well, he thought, I've vindicated myself, that much they have to give me. Maybe we won't win the game, although it would be nice to accomplish that miracle, but at least they can't say I didn't play football.

He heard a frantic screaming and opened his eyes again. A pass was in the air. He twisted his head to follow it. Three men were under the pigskin on the ten yard line, one of them a Bear. Fingers reached—one of the men got it. There was a pile-up of the three, and a striped shirt dove in to find the ball. Quist had it!

Jimmy was on his feet and his helmet was in his hand. Dancer grabbed

him by the arm as the thousands screamed for him.

"Listen, kid," Dancer said, and his eyes were sincere, "don't go in there if the leg isn't right. After all, there are other things more important than this football game."

Jimmy knew what it cost Dancer to say that at this time. Jimmy grinned. "Name one," he said, and he trotted out onto the field. His knee felt a lot better than it had when he came out.

The ball was on the ten and Jimmy could see the Cougar defense spreading for the passes. Time was running short. It took patience, Jimmy realized. It had to be done right.

Jimmy pounded at the Cougar line. Malley and Quist bit off five to six yards at a crack. But still the Cougars wouldn't come in, they continued to play a five man line. They realized that the Bears didn't have the time to go the distance of the field five yards at a crack.

Jimmy realized it, too. On the thirty he tried a pass. Cougars came from everywhere to bat it down.

He went back to Malley and Quist, hoping to break one loose. The Cougars would lie back until they saw that Jimmy didn't have the ball, then they drove in for the ball-carrier. Let the Bears make five, six, seven or more yards each crack. The Cougars were now playing for a tie.

Jimmy tried another pass and again it was incomplete. There were too many Cougars in the secondary. It was then that Jimmy formed his plan. He knew he could pitch a pass sixty yards in the air with a fair degree of accuracy. That's what it was going to take to win this game.

Jimmy kept hammering Malley and Quist until there was less than a minute to play and the fans were screaming frantically for a pass. The Cougars were beginning to believe that Jimmy was playing for the tie, too.

"Listen," Jimmy said to the right end, "you run down the sideline to the ten yard line, get it? Then cut across the field right on the ten yard line, tight-rope it. I'll spot a pass to the ten yard line right down

the middle. And be sure to loaf a little on the way down so you've got something to turn on when the time comes."

"I gotta have time to get there," the end said.

"Don't worry about it," Jimmy said. "Do it like I say and when you get there, the pass'll be there. You guys in the line give me everything you've got for protection."

THE BEARS whipped up to the line of scrimmage, less than thirty seconds to play. Jimmy barked the signals and took the ball with twenty seconds to play. He started to fade. Every receiver was up short except the right end who was scooting down the sideline. The safety man picked up the end and raced with him, step for step.

Jimmy continued to fade as time was running out. He faded back across the midfield stripe and back across his own forty, limping and scuttling away from an over-eager lineman who nearly got him. On the thirty he stopped and cocked his arm. Concentrating with every nerve, he whipped the ball into the air. Long and high it went.

As Jimmy pitched and followed through, his weight came over on his left leg. He crumpled as the lineman hit him.

The ball floated high into the air, going up and up and then starting down. The end reached the ten yard line and suddenly cut straight across the field. He turned on a burst of speed and the maneuver put him two steps ahead of his man and that's all he needed. For a moment it looked as though the ball was a fraction of a second ahead of him. His fingers reached for it, he juggled it as the pounding wave of pandemonium reached down from the stands and drowned out the puny crack of the final gun. Then he had control and cut to the end zone.

The desperate safety man lunged through the air and hit him. They tore up white chalk as they hit the ground and slid into the end zone. The referee came racing across the

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THIS RUBE'LL BE READY!

by **RICHARD
BRISTER**

He went over backwards
and fell like a ton of bricks!



If Rudy ever hoped to get a crack at the fight game's big money, he had to stop this tough little scrapper they were testing him on right now, this round, with a haymaker!

IT WAS just a club fight. The smoky, noise-laden hall was no bigger than a first-rate hay barn. The ring was a makeshift affair that

persisted in jigglng around as they worked under the glare of the big, two-hundred-watt bulbs.

The crowd was made up of rowdy,

hardbitten souls, and some of the things the bloodthirsty ringsiders yelled through the ropes at Rudy caused him to knit his wide, sun-burned forehead in mute disapproval.

Rudy Paxler was a farm boy, but no prude. He had picked up a fair knowledge of the seamier side of life from listening to his father's hired hands as they worked in the flat fields of Indiana.

Still, this raw, rough crowd, which kept up a constant vocal cacaphony at the ringside, caused the nineteen-year-old youngster to wince a trifle as he tried to relax on the stool in his corner.

It was the third, coming up. He looked across the ring where his opponent sprawled lazily against the ring post, like a long, confident cat. The fellow had poked his gloves repeatedly into Rudy's face, which was puffed and red from the mauling it had taken.

"You all right, kid?" The listless voice phrasing that question came from one of the punchy handlers who had been assigned to Rudy's corner for this, his first professional fight. He was actually being paid for this three-rounder. The club was coughing up twenty dollars for the loser, thirty for the winner.

Rudy pushed straw-colored hair off his forehead with a gloved left hand, and looked up at the disinterested man who was lackadaisically sponging cold water across his bruised freckled face.

"I'll make it," Rudy said.

He heard the light tap on the gong which passed for a warning buzzer, here in this ramshackle, barn-like arena. He stood up as the gong clanged more loudly, sending him out to do battle once more.

He told himself that he had to stop this fellow this round. It was not so much a matter of the money involved. Ten dollars more or less was of small moment, he thought, but a man's whole future was something else again.

Rudy's future hung in the balance, here and now. Down by the ring, a pock-nosed, sharp-eyed little man

named Trigger Harron sat hunched forward on the rude wooden seat, watching every move Rudy made with a sharply-appraising professional eye. And beside Trigger Harron sat a stocky, red-faced man with the hard, calloused hands of a farmer, Rudy's father.

In Rudy's dressing room before this fight, Trigger Harron, who was an expert handler of fighters, had helped settle an old argument between Rudy and his father.

"All right," the bulbous-nosed little manager had said, "the kid wants to make a career out of fighting, and you don't approve, Mr. Paxler. Is that right?"

Rudy's father still spoke with a betraying accent from the mother country. "You bet. The boy can make good living home on the farm. He has nice girl waiting for him. What for should he want to go fighting and get himself all banged up?"

"For money," Trigger Harron announced blandly. "That's the only reason that tempts any sensible man into the fight game, Mr. Paxler."

RUDY NODDED, and buttoned his lip. No use putting his two cents in, he thought, so long as this Trigger Harron was carrying the verbal ball for him. Be kind of nice, he thought, having somebody like this Harron do all his talking for him. Like most farm folk, Rudy wasn't much of a tongue-wagger.

"Money!" his father was snorting. "Who gets it? Not him—" and he waved a work-hardened hand toward Rudy "—unless he's one by a thousand."

"That," said Harron, "is just what I came up here to Terre Haute to find out, Mr. Paxler. I made my living in this game for more years'n you can shake a stick at. I'll know, when I see him in action down there, whether your boy's got what it takes to make a go of it in the fight game."

"Hmmmph!" said Rudy's father. Plainly, he was not too impressed by the appearance of flashy, bulbous-nosed, Trigger Harron.

Rudy sneaked a hand around in back of his dad and pinched the old-

er man sharply. He tried to take the sting out of his father's retort to the fight manager.

"Pop don't mean nothing, Mr. Harron. I'm his only son, so I guess he kind of worries about me. You—you mean—if I look all right tonight, y-you m-might con-consider taking me on?"

The little man lit a cigarette with nicotine-stained fingers, not looking at him. "I might," he said noncommittally.

"I'm ready to abide by your decision," Rudy said quickly, and looked toward his dad. Here was a chance, he saw, to settle the ancient dispute between father and son. "Okay, Dad?"

The older man shifted uncomfortably, stood locked in silent struggle with himself for some moments, before he answered, "All right. How could I stop you? I can't throw you in jail, can I?"

So that's how it was. And here he was, in the third round with this tough, limber scrapper. The dark-haired boy had outclassed him during the two opening cantos, Rudy realized. This was his first pro go, and his confidence had taken a Cook's Tour at the outset.

But now he fought with a quiet fury, born of desperation. He wanted a crack at the fight game before settling down to life on the farm. He'd dreamed of this chance too long to let his hopes go glimmering at the last moment.

He ducked back and away from one of the other fighter's long left hands, swivelled in fast, and buried a short right deep in the fellow's middle.

The boy gasped. Rudy could feel the hot breath being exhaled down against his shoulder.

He poured it into the other's weakened middle. He felt the fellow trying to grasp him in a clinch, and twisted free. He came up, blinking under the lights, to see the jutting chin exposed nicely before him, in perfect range of his strong right hand.

Rudy threw it with a slight, chopping motion. The sound of the solid impact was not unlike the

sound of an axe biting deep into wood. The dark-haired fighter's eyes rolled, displaying two tiny white curtains. Then the lids formed a real curtain over the rolling eyeballs. The boy's hands dropped, and he dropped with them.

He hit the canvas with a solid *thuck*, and the ref counted over him, trying to make the counts heard over the cacaphony of noise from the startled ringsiders.

Rudy signed a contract with Trigger Harron an hour later. During the next eight weeks, he fought six prelim fights. He won the first four, three by knockouts, one via decision. The last two he lost on points.

HHE WAS a young man in a hurry to make a name for himself in his chosen profession, and he protested to Harron, "Seems to me I'm working too much and too often, Mr. Harron." He had never been able really to warm up to this man, had never quite dared call him "Trigger." "I might've copped these last two goes, if I wasn't dog-tired."

"Suppose you let me be the judge of that, kid," slurred Harron. He sat on the bed in their hotel room, and poured whiskey into a tumbler on the bed table before him. His voice was furry, and his eyes had a vacant look to them. "You do the fightin', kid, and let me do the thinkin'."

"Well, sure, but—"

"Lissen, kid, I ain't in no mood to discuss it with you. I been in this business too many years to waste my time talking policy with a thick-headed farm rube out of Indiana."

He had the grace to catch his breath, at least, when he saw how the bottle had tricked him. Rudy stared at him, said coldly, "Is that your opinion of me, Mr. Harron? Just a thick-headed rube, huh?"

"Now, kid, listen, I—"

"Maybe," Rudy said thickly, "that being the case, you and me'd better just call it quits, Mr. Harron. It's certain we won't be much more good to each other, feeling this way. I haven't been too pleased with the

way you've handled me, either, as far as that goes."

"Oh, you haven't, hey?" slurred Harron. "Well, that's just too damn bad, kid. It happens you and me've got a contract. Try and weasel out on me now, and I'll have you in front of a judge so quick you'll think you're ridin' a rocket."

Rudy looked at the little man with the bulbous nose, disliking him thoroughly, but saying nothing. For nothing he could think of to say seemed to fit this situation.

Five nights later, he got in there with Petey Salvadore at the Philly Arena. Petey Salvadore was a very good boy. The things he did to the still-green farm kid from Indiana even caused a flutter of sympathy in the hearts of the hardened ring-siders.

"That kid's got the moxie," one seamy-faced newspaperman muttered. "He'll be a great middle-weight, some day. But right now he's a couple miles out of his class. His manager's either a fool or a filthy rat, for signing that green kid up with Petey. Whup! What'd I tell you?"

Pete Salvadore, at that precise moment, was hurling a vicious right hand to the chin of Rudy. Rudy did as pretty a tumble as had been lately seen in the Philly Arena. He lay like a stone on the canvas, not hearing the ref count over him, which was merciful, in a way, for it was the first time he ever had been kayoed.

His head ached for hours after the fight. He dragged himself, miserably, to the hotel room he was currently sharing with 'friend' Trigger Harron. He lay on his bed, rubbing the double blobs of raw pain at his forehead, in an effort to ease the steady throbbing.

Trigger Harron came in from the elevators, followed by fully half a dozen beetle-browed South Philadelphia characters. Trigger was not entirely sober. He got on the phone, ordered a card table and setups. In fifteen minutes, Trigger and the unholy half dozen were engrossed in a game of stud.

The thick cigar smoke got in

Rudy's eyes and in his throat. He thought of hiring himself another room, to get away from the fumes and the racket. But some impulse chained him to his bed, held his eyes in steady focus on the grinning men around that poker table.

PERHAPS he was psychic. It was well past midnight when a drunken Trigger Harron, broke and disgruntled, was forced out of the game he himself had started. He leered wolfishly at Rudy, said to the half dozen, "Hey, wait up a minute, you guys."

"Skip it, Trigger," somebody growled. "You're through for tonight. You're flat, and—"

"Who says so?" Trigger blurted. "I guess I still own the kid's contract, don't I? Guess that's worth somethin'."

"Yeah," breathed one of the six, softly, "it just might be, at that. The kid got plunked tonight, but he might still come along, if he's handled careful." The man held out a thin sheaf of greenbacks. "Here you are, Trigger."

"What's that?"

"Two hundred smacks, for the kid's contract."

"I ain't that drunk," Trigger snorted.

Rudy lay there on the shadowed bed in the darkened corner, feeling cheap and disgusted. Why, they were bickering about him the way stock buyers bickered about prime beef on the hoof, just so much flesh to be haggled over! He was too dismayed to speak up, and besides, he couldn't imagine what good it would do. Maybe he'd be better off, anyhow, if somebody else did get his contract away from Trigger Harron.

But Trigger smelled the tension that had suddenly entered the room, and suddenly sobered. "You guys act plenty interested," he said. "Know why? 'Cause the kid's good. He's gonna be middleweight champ, 'fore he's finished. Once he works off the rough edges, he—"

"Five hundred, Trigger."

But Trigger craftily refused to do business at that price. Rudy received the shock of his young life,

when the deal was finally arrived at and consummated, with Trigger selling a seventh interest in the contract to each man present, craftily retaining a seventh interest for himself. And for the six-sevenths he sold, the bulbous-nosed man received a cool thousand dollars.

Rudy hated to imagine his future under a managership split so many ways. "But, gosh," he thought, "I must look pretty good, for them to bid that high on me. Now, if I could only line myself up a really good handler, I'd go places fast."

He went places fast, all right, in the fortnight that followed. The unholy six were interested mainly in realizing a profit from their investment, preferably a fast profit. They agreed to let Trigger Harron carry on the managing duties as before. But Trigger was accountable to the six, as to a board of directors.

"Keep the kid fighting," said the six. So Rudy was kept fighting. He fought seven times in the next two months. He won three and dropped four. He was gradually picking up a few tricks at the gyms where he spent his mornings, but Harron seldom bothered to try to teach the farm kid anything, if, in fact, the bottle-punishing manager knew anything of the technique of fighting.

Rudy's record was anything but impressive; still, after his fight with Kid Cola, which held down the third prelim spot in the Garden, he was interviewed by Matt Webb, a reporter for *Fightdom*, a trade magazine for fisticuffers.

WEBB WAS a tall, smooth-faced man, with sparse, iron-gray hair, quietly dressed, and quiet of manner. His big nose had that slight concavity at the bridge which betrayed the fact he had once been a fighter; otherwise you'd never have guessed it. His face was not scarred, his hands were smooth and well-cared-for; his manner was friendly and unaggressive.

Rudy liked him right off the bat, when he shook hands with the big fellow.

"Sitdown, Mr. Webb," and he waved at a locker bench. "Trigger

isn't here just now. He went across the street to—uh—to get something he needed and—"

Matt Webb laughed, a deep, booming sound that seemed to come straight from within his huge chest. "I knew Trigger's weakness for the stuff before you were born, young fellow. Though it's decent of you to cover up for him. Anyway, it was you I wanted to talk to, Paxler."

"Y-yes, sir."

"Call me 'Matt,' kid." The big man grinned easily at him. "That was a nice scrap you just put up out there against Cola. I figure you're going places, kid. Like to do a feature article on you for *Fightdom*."

"Yes, si—uh—I mean, Matt."

"Tell me about yourself, kid."

Rudy did. He found it a pleasure, talking to this big, bluff, friendly man who had been a heavyweight back in the days of Dempsey and Tunney, had done a stint as manager in the thirties, and was now a well-known fight writer. Matt Webb was without pretense or guile, real folks, as Rudy privately put it.

"I'd sure like to have you managing me," Rudy told the big fellow, quite frankly, as he shook goodbye with Webb.

Matt Webb laughed. "It's years since I've taken any active part in the game, son. I might not be any good for you. I'll say this much, though. If you were a free agent, or if your contract was ever put up for sale, I'd jump to try my luck with you."

Rudy remembered those words, in the month that followed, a month during which he was worked too hard, as usual. He finished the month by being kayoed a second time, in a set-to with tough, smart Sammy Ambrose, from 'Frisco.

"You're trying to bring me along too fast," he protested to Trigger Harron. "If you'd let me take a couple months off, and polish up my footwork, sharpen up on my punching—"

"You're trying to think again, kid," sneered Trigger Harron. "I already warned you about that. All you gotta do is keep usin' your mus-

cles, and let me do the headwork... You're fightin' Bobo Pittman the tenth of June, for your information."

"Pittman!" cried Rudy. "But he's an oldtimer. He's got a hundred fights in back of him. I'm not ready for—"

"You turning yellow on me?," said Trigger Harron. "If there's one thing makes me itch, it's a yellow fighter."

"All right, all right," Rudy shrugged bleakly. "I guess you're still the doctor."

He had a letter from Terre Haute, the next morning, from his father.

Dear Son:

I hope you will not make like a mulehead, and refuse to stop until you make yourself hurt bad with fighting. I seen by the paper about you getting knocked out. Mama and I are worried about you.

Remember it is only a fool who thinks because he takes one step toward a mud puddle he must keep walking into it. This box fighting can be very bad to anybody who does not make champion quick.

I hope you can decide pretty soon now. You was always clear-headed fella. I know you will make good decision.

Mama says love.

Father

P.S. The blue sow you was feeding come down with foots disease, so had to sell her, dirt cheap, to Carl Funk, to be butchered.

It pained Rudy to think how his ring career, if it could be called that, worried his parents. He thought things out carefully, then penned a return-mail reply to his father.

Dear Dad:

I guess you are right. I fight a fellow named Bobo Pittman, June 10, and if it looks to me, after that one, that I am walking into the puddle you speak of, I will take your advice and get out while I still have a

straight nose.

One thing that has held me back some is I am 'over-managed. I think if I could solve that problem, and get a manager who knows his business, and sticks to it, I would go places fast.

We'll see what we'll see. Wish me luck against Pittman. He's plenty good, I hear.

*Love,
Rudy*

The unholy six were right on hand in the dressing room of the fighter they had won part interest in during a poker game. Trigger Harron was there, acting nervous, and carrying a breath which bade fair to knock Rudy out even before he got up there in the ring with the veteran Bobo Pittman.

A fine thing, Rudy thought, going into the toughest scrap of your life with a drunk working your corner. If Trigger would get falling-down drunk it would be better. Somebody would have to take over for him. But always, at times like this, the bulbous-nosed man got just so tipsy and no more, so that he looked all right up there in Rudy's corner.

The unholy six clustered around, inspecting Rudy much as fair officials might inspect some prize livestock.

"How 'bout ya, kid? You feel ready?" one asked.

"Gonna put in on Pittman out there tonight?" queried another.

RUDY KNEW what it was. They wanted to bet on him, for he was long-priced tonight. But they wanted to be sure, before risking their money on him. He said impatiently, "I got a fight coming up, you guys. Lay off for a while, will you? And besides, how should I know what I'll do up there?"

The door opened, just that moment, and Matt Webb walked in. Rudy grinned. It warmed him inside, somehow, just being in this big, friendly, honest-faced man's presence.

Matt Webb knew everybody in the

fight game, and could walk into any dressing room he cared to, without knocking. He nodded at Trigger Harron, flicked a caustic brow at the six, and grinned largely on Rudy.

"Luck, tonight, kid."

"Thanks, Mr. Webb."

Trigger Harron's thin mouth grew even thinner. "You met my boy, Webb? What's the big deal, here?"

"Take it easy," said Matt Webb. "I interviewed the kid after the Cola fight, Trigger. You'll be reading about him in this month's *Fightdom*, out next Tuesday."

Trigger subsided. "Yeah? Say, that's all right. You must like the kid, Matt, to give him a write-up."

"I do," Matt Webb said matter-of-factly. "As I told the kid, if he was a free agent, or his contract was up for sale, I'd take him on in a minute."

Trigger Harron's greedy eyes flickered at the unholy six, who were all interest, now. "Everything's for sale, Matt," said Trigger, "for a price. How high would you go?"

"A thousand," said Matt Webb, without blinking.

Trigger Harron scowled at the price, but spent a moment or two in consultation with the six before saying, "Sorry, we ain't interested. If you wanted to go just a little beyond that—"

"I said I liked the kid's looks," Matt Webb laughed softly. "I don't recall saying I was crazy." He swung through the door, calling over one big shoulder, "See you guys later."

Rudy relaxed, sighing deeply, on the rubbing table. For a moment there, he had almost hoped...

He was up there. He was in his corner, under the glaring lights, staring across the ring at a man who was fully ten years his senior, a man who had spent a third of his life as a leather pusher.

Bobo Pittman was a chunky, bull-necked man, with a battered, Mongoloid face, and long, hairy arms. He looked supremely sure of himself, and there was a glitter of sadism lurking deep in the close-set black eyes.

The bell rang, and the crowd yelled, and Rudy got up and went

out there to meet the bull's rush of the aggressive Pittman. He put his left arm out, meaning to keep the other man at his distance with that tactic. It was no good, he discovered. One thing he had not counted upon was the abnormal length of this Pittman's gorilla-like arms. The man had fully three inches of reach advantage on Rudy, and he delivered himself of his punches in a peculiar, twisting fashion that added to that potent advantage.

"Oh, you butcher boy," somebody was yelling, down at the ringside. "Go get him."

They called Pittman a butcher boy, and with reason, Rudy saw swiftly. The man's looping lefts and rights arced in at him from every angle. He was powerless to keep the other man's gloves from landing upon him.

"Carve him, Bobo!"

"Drop that meatball, Bobo. You got him scared silly."

IN A WAY, that was true. Rudy was scared, in the way any normal human being gets scared when confronted by an apparently insoluble problem. He saw definitely that the long left was not sufficient deterrent to the snake-like lunges of his opponent. He tried to clinch with the veteran miller, who was crowding him now, eager for a spectacular, first-canto kayo.

Pittman brought two ripping punches up against Rudy's ribs, sent the farm kid hurtling back against the ring ropes. When Rudy bounced off them, he was met by a savage one-two from the hairy-armed battler. He went down like Humpty Dumpty.

The crowd screamed. Pittman danced happily to a neutral corner, resting his broad back against the post, his arms draped atop the ropes.

Rudy sat bleary-eyed on the canvas, and watched the ref's white-sleeved arm rising and falling, like a pump handle, just above and before him.

"...four...five...six..." said the insistent voice, and Rudy shook his head, trying to clear it.

The count went to eight, and he staggered erect. Pittman was on him like a great, hairy ape. The veteran tagged him with a left, setting him up, then delivered the lethal right to the button. Rudy went fully ten feet across the ring, staggering backward pell-mell, before he brought up against the ropes, and slid down them.

As he crumbled to the floor, he heard the harsh clang of the bell, down somewhere below them.

Trigger Harron slid through the ropes, and hoisted him erect quickly, acting like a cold-sober, honest-to-gosh fight handler in front of the eyes of these thousands.

"It's all right, kid. He got to you a couple times, there. But you'll be all right. Stay with it. You'll solve him."

"His arms are too long," mumbled Rudy. "My left can't keep him back out of range. And when I try to clinch with the guy, he throws rocks at my belly."

"Take it easy, kid. You'll get this guy's number. Stay with him in there."

Rudy wondered, as the ten-second buzzer jerked him out of the stool, what it would be like to have a real man in his corner, just once. Stay with him, said Trigger. Well, thought Rudy, that was easy. The big thing, though, was to discover some way to get away from this boring mole of a Bobo Pittman.

He was still shaky, answering the bell for the second, and the veteran could see that. He came in eagerly therefore, hoping to finish up this night's work with dispatch, and enhance his record.

Rudy tried the long left, knowing no other tactic, and got tagged on the forehead by one of those looping long arms of Pittman's. Rudy tried to clinch, then, and was scored upon hard, in the middle.

He knew, now, that he was at last in the ring with a fighter of class, the kind of fighter he hoped to be some day—and would be, with a few years more of training, provided he wasn't cut to pieces in the process of getting that training.

Right now, he was way out of

his class. He should never have been put in the same ring with this Pittman, he knew quite realistically, and he suddenly started to slug with the veteran.

After all, he was thinking, it's a foregone conclusion that this guy's going to plunk me. I might as well bring things right to a head. Why make a dragged-out affair of it?

In that, friend Pittman seemed to agree. The veteran's hairy long arms found Rudy's nose, his ears, his chest, with rocking punches. Rudy was forced back into a corner, and stood toe to toe with the veteran there, exchanging hard left and right hand blows.

IT WAS salt and pepper for the crowd, and they were yelling like zanies. Rudy caught another hard one downstairs, was doubled up, reaching, and dropped his guard in an instinctive gesture to protect his vulnerable middle from further onslaughts.

Pittman hit him on the chin with a beauty.

It was like rocks, tons of rocks. He went over backward, and fell for some hours, and then the canvas hit him, but hard, in the small of the back. He saw stars putting on a brief toe dance in front of him, and his head ached like blazes, but surprisingly, he did not black out.

He was about through, now, he realized. He supposed he could take a count and get up. It would prove very little, for Pittman would simply plunk him again and there'd be an end to it.

The ref was counting.

The noise of the crowd was so great that it seemed to him he lay under a waterfall.

He lay there, thinking, thinking disconnectedly of his father's reference to the blue sow which had come down with the foot disease, and had to be sold to the butcher, and of Matt Webb, who had offered to buy his contract from Trigger and the unholy six, but who would not go past a thousand, and of Trigger Harron, who was staring at him with tipsy indifference now, from the corner, who had blandly advised him

to "stay with him in there, kid. You'll get his number."

It came to him, somewhat dazedly, that there was a pattern to all these apparently disconnected ideas, if he could only make himself see it. A pattern which might go a long way toward solving his problem.

He suddenly remembered something else that Trigger Harron once had told him, and he jerked on the canvas, realizing with a start that this was the key that would unlock the whole future for him.

It was a terrible thing that he had to do now, but he saw that there was no other way for it. He got to his hands and knees, as the ref's voice went up to "...seven..." He came lumbering erect, still somewhat dazed, as the count continued.

Pittman came dancing across the ring, eager to get at him and finish up this night's labors.

Rudy suddenly flung up a barrier of crossed arms in front of his face, and cowered behind it. He ran backward, cringing abjectly, as the veteran, puzzled, tried to get into position to score a final punch.

A stunned silence locked thousands of voices in as many throats. Then one hardy soul at the ring-side, with a quicker reaction time than that of the others, cupped his hands toward the ring and blasted away with both verbal barrels.

"Stan' up an' fight, Paxler, ya yella belly."

"Quit runnin' ya bum!"

"Kill that gutless punk, Bobo."

And Bobo eagerly tried to comply. He finally got Rudy in a corner, from which position the Indiana farm kid could not escape, and took a sidearm swipe at Rudy with his gloved right hand.

It was no more than a glancing blow, but Rudy keeled over, as if felled by an axe. He lay on the rosin, patently unhurt by the 'punch' that had just dropped him, and watched the ref's arm rise and fall ten times. He tried hard to ignore the venomous hoots and catcalls and razzberries from the irate crowd. It took a cordon of police to safely escort him to his dressing room...

"So then," said Matt Webb, smil-

ing unaffectedly around at Trigger Harron, the unholy six, and at Rudy as he carefully placed the legal-looking document in his pocket, "that does it. It looks as if I've bought me a fighter."

TRIGGER HARRON, now that the deal disposing of Rudy to the big man was completed, abruptly dropped the mask of tense affability he had worn for Matt Webb's benefit. "You're entitled to your opinion, Matt. If you wanta think of the kid, here, as a fighter, after the yellow smell he just made in there with Pittman, it ain't my place to tell you you're crazy."

He looked at the unholy six, and waved Matt Webb's thousand-dollar check in one reddened hand. "Let's find some place to cash this thing and make the split," he suggested. The six greedily followed him out.

Matt Webb watched the door shut behind the last of them, then said, "They're going to feel mighty foolish when you're middleweight champ, kid. How'd you ever think up that stunt? I mean—putting on the no-moxie act out there?"

"Something Trigger once said," Rudy grinned. "'If there's one thing makes me itch,' he told me, 'it's a yellow fighter.' I didn't think you'd be fooled by that act I put on. But Trigger went for it nice, didn't he?"

"His kind," said Matt Webb, "generally judge others by themselves, kid. And, of course, his six side-kicks don't know beans about fighting. Trigger was pretty drunk, too." The big man frowned. "Wish I could say as much for the Commission."

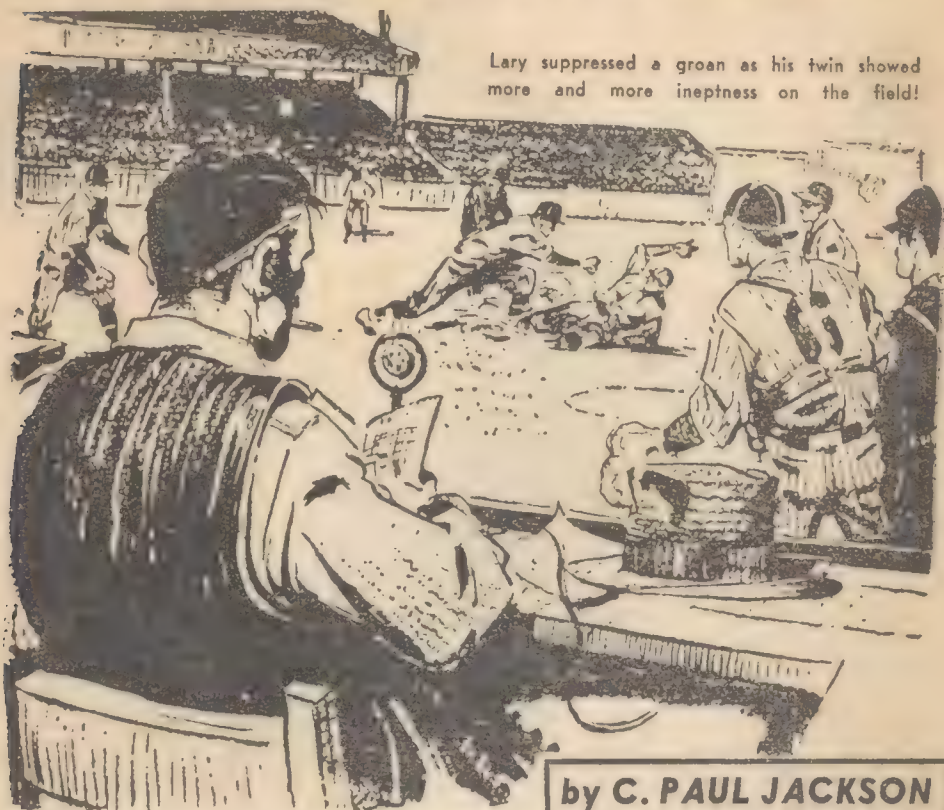
"Gosh," gulped Rudy, "you mean—they might set me down?"

Matt Webb nodded. "I've already spoken to two of them. It looks like a six months' suspension for you, kid. After all, you did look pretty bad in there. But I put a bug in the ear of one of the Commish men for you. Gave him a hint why you were forced to put on the act out there. I think they'll lift your suspension in three months. And besides, we'll need that long to work up your

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THE KING of SWAP

Lary suppressed a groan as his twin showed more and more ineptness on the field!



by C. PAUL JACKSON

Maybe what the sports pages need is a few ballplayers pounding out the copy — and maybe what the ball clubs need is a few sportswriters out on the diamond!

EVERYBODY in the park knew from the instant the ball rode off the bat that it was going for a hit. It was in that extra-base lane between center and left. The lanky center fielder churned long legs over the turf. He speared the drive on the long hop and the peg he cut loose to the plate was something to see.

"Shades of Tris Speaker!" a sports writer up in the press box of the minor league park groaned. "He's done it again!"

The ball had carried on a line to the infield grass, hopped straight for the catcher's mitt. It was per-

fect—except for the little detail of being thrown to the wrong base. The batter took advantage of the long throw and beat the catcher's hurried peg to second. That made another man in position to score on a base-hit.

"There's my lead for tomorrow's column," the sports writer said. "Goen keeps goin'. Stretches games gummed to six."

"Kinda rough to needle a young player like that, ain't it?"

The sports writer grinned and looked briefly at the big man who spoke from behind him. There was something vaguely familiar about the

ruddy face and clear blue eyes. Probably some visiting newspaperman he'd seen somewhere.

"Oh, Lary wouldn't feel comfortable if I didn't razz him," the sports writer said. "We've always needed each other."

"You know Lary Goen pretty well?"

The sports writer grinned and a small dimple appeared briefly in the flesh over his left cheekbone. "We're twins," he said. "I'm Cary Goen."

The ruddy-faced man nodded, said no more. Idly he noted that a tiny scar marked the spot of the odd dimple. It would not be noticed unless Cary Goen grinned.

Down on the field the man at the plate slashed a clean single to right and the runner on second scored. Lary Goen raced a country mile to drag down a long drive for the inning-ending putout, but the run that had been placed in scoring position by his wrong-base peg proved to be the ball game when the lights dimmed.

Cary Goen went to town in his column that night.

Lary Goen propped his morning paper against the sugar bowl and prepared to demolish his eggs and toast. He looked first at *SPORTS SHOTS*, by Cary Goen. He was thinking that it was really something for a fellow just out of college to be a full fledged sports writer, even on a minor league city paper. Then as he read down his twin's column, Lary Goen's jaws moved slower and slower.

...It is the regular turn for Pop Donnelly to pitch the Old Workhorse for the homeclub tonight. But Pop may decide to use Goen on the rubber, on the theory that there is only one place for him to throw at from the mound...

There were plenty of other barbs. Lary Goen scowled as he crunched the final bit of toast. Doggone it, too much was enough—even from a twin brother!

H E GRABBED the paper and strode for the elevator. Cary had 311 and he'd still be in bed. What that wise gent needed was a lungful of telling-off and he was going to get it. Cary sleepily opened the door after the ballplayer had thumped it lustily.

"Good morning, Merry Sunshine." Cary yawned. "What brings you out of the ether so early? You sensitive athletes need your—"

"Sensitive!" Lary Goen snorted. "A fat lot you know about sensitivity!" He shoved the paper under his twin's nose. "What's with this tripe?"

The sports writer glanced at the column, lifted an eyebrow.

"Nice alliteration, isn't it? Rather pungent, too."

"Pungent!" Lary sputtered. "It stinks! You know what I mean. What's with the big needle jab at me?"

"My, my, he's all wrought up! Haven't you heard of publicity being the life blood of a professional athlete?"

"Being behind the eight ball every day in your crummy column is fine publicity! Phooey! Any dumb lug could dig out enough trash to satisfy the morons who lap up your junk and have time left to second-guess the guys on the field!"

"Say-y-y! It takes more brains and hard work to write one paragraph of my stuff than you monkeys put out in a whole season!" Cary Goen laughed derisively. "I'd like to see the column any of you jokers could turn out!"

Lary Coen stared at his twin silently for a moment. Then a gleam of pure joy showed from the eyes of the ballplayer.

"You've bought yourself something, hot shot," Lary said. "When you see how much better a simple, every day guy can do your alleged tough-to-do stuff, it may percolate through your ego-swollen skull that the guys on the field deserve a better break than being used as guinea pigs for your gab!"

"What are you raving about,

Lary?"

"Your precious column. You've been throwing it into me and the team; you claim your triple-dyed cracks are so tough to do. Okay. I'll write your column tonight!"

"Just like that. You can dash it off between innings, I suppose!"

"Could be. But maybe I'd need a little time, so I'll make a deal with you. I write your stuff tonight, you take my spot in the outfield. I'll take a terrific beating in the averages but it'll be worth it to steer you back on a kind of human stance on this column business. If I don't do a better job of writing your junk than you turn in playing the outfield, I'll take all you can dish out without a peep; if I *do* a better job, you agree to lay off the scintillating cracks!"

"You've got sand in your head!" Cary Goen looked at his twin incredulously. "I'm no athlete. You're the muscle man!"

"You made a baseball letter in school." The ballplayer shrugged. He was thinking gleefully that his bluff had backed Cary against the ropes. "Of course, if you want to confess that the fellows you've been panning are better men than you—And I saved your bacon that time when I pinch-hit for you in your Journalism class. I did all right and I—"

"Yeah!" Cary Goen snorted. Unconsciously his fingers went to the tiny scar on his cheek. "But I wrote the piece and I would have been there to deliver it myself if you hadn't talked me into the twin-switch act and I was in your blasted Gym class the day some jerk had to slip on the rings and let one of them wallop me!"

THE SPORTS writer shook his head while his fingertips caressed the tiny scar.

"I've always got rooked on those switch deals," he said. "No soap."

"Well, I figured you wouldn't have the guts," the ballplayer said. "You're admitting that an ordinary guy could write your junk and—"

"I'm admitting nothing of the sort!" The heat behind the sports writer's words gave evidence that Cary Goen was more than nettled. "By golly, I could probably put out a better ball game than you've been playing, at that!"

Lary Goen shrugged. "You can have the chance," he said easily. He was thinking, well, maybe this little bluff will make him chew over this needling business anyway. He said, "I'll take the beating in my league averages just for an opportunity to bring you off the high-and-mighty spot you've elevated yourself to. What's your program for today?"

"My stint for the paper is in." Cary Goen's expression was thoughtful. "Only thing I have on tap is a date to play the weekly round of golf with Pop Donnely. You can—"

"Deal's off!" it was the ballplayer who interrupted now. "You know doggone well that I couldn't carry Pop around eighteen holes the way you do. You manage to lose by a hole—or break even—just to keep Pop good humored so he'll give out with baseball dope you can use in your column. But I'd beat the pants off him and—well, Pop's my boss. The deal's off!"

"Oh, no, my dear twin!" The sports writer grinned wickedly. He well knew that Lary was incapable of carrying anybody in any kind of competition. Lary played to win always, at the top of his ability. "And if anything slips up on this fish-fry, Pop will know it was you who gave him the business!"

"No! Forget I ever said anything about a switch. Forget the—"

"Nix." Cary Goen figured he had his twin by the short hair. "It's your deal. Back down now, and you're admitting that you couldn't begin to even make motions like a newspaperman!"

Lary Goen gave his twin a narrow-lidded look. So the lug figured he was going to back down. Nuts, guess he could carry Pop somehow.

"Okay, hot shot," he said grimly. "The switch is on!"

POP DONNELLY, veteran owner and manager of the minor league club for which Lary Goen played, sank to the bench under the oak at the tenth tee and heaved a sigh. He mopped his leathery face with a red bandana handkerchief.

"Squirrely, that's me," Pop grunted. "An old gaffer who drains his life blood into one of these gypsy scarfs when he gets a mite warm oughta know better'n to traipse after a golf ball on a sizzling day. We'd better call off our two-bit Nassau and quit. You been limpin' the last coupla holes anyway. How come, Cary?"

Lary Goen collapsed gratefully to the cool, shaded seat. A worried expression held the back of his eyes.

"I turned my ankle on a rock, hunting my ball in the gully on the fifth hole," he said. "Must have given it a worse twist than I thought."

"Good thing for me, looks like." Pop mopped his brow. "You sure started off like a prairie fire. Four holes you took me in a row before I begin catching you. But we'll call off the rest, huh?"

Lary Goen nodded. A fine kettle of finan haddie if this ankle twist was bad. Maybe a good thing that he and Cary had made the switch. A night's rest and the ankle would probably be as good as new. Nuts there wouldn't have been a twisted ankle if he hadn't been a sucker and suggested the goofy act. He scowled, visualizing his twin lounging in some cool spot with a tall, iced drink. What a brainstorm this thing had been!

"There's somethin' I kinda want to talk with you about," Pop Donnelly went on. "This guff you put out in your column: it gets read, you know. Now, Lary is young. You can't expect a kid just off college diamonds to not make some mistakes. You probably don't mean the things you write to harm Lary, but—well, I wish you could kinda soft-pedal, at least for the next few days."

"What's so different about the next few days?"

"This has to be off the record,

Cary. Mike Harrigan is in town and I gotta hunch he's considerin' Lary as a buy for the Sox. Mike and me played ball together in the old days and I know Mike ain't no dope. He knows talent when he sees it, but if your brother is frettin' over your needling, he's liable not to show at his best for Mike. You wouldn't wanta cost Lary a chance to move up to the big time, would you?"

Lary Goen grinned inwardly. A big league scout here to look him over and a measly sports writer would show in his spot. This thing would have to stop right now. In his excitement, the ballplayer jumped erect. He'd tell Pop the setup and—he groaned. He'd do nothing of the kind. He could barely stand his weight on that bad ankle.

Cary Goen sauntered into the hotel. Lary should be back from his golf with Pop and ripe for a little needling. Automatically he stopped at the desk and the clerk handed him his mail and a phone slip. Little beads of sweat broke out on the forehead of the sports writer as he read the phone memo. He yelled, "Holy . suffering sunfish!" as he drew a beeline for the elevator.

HE GOT OFF at his floor, ran down the corridor. Lary would listen to reason. But if he didn't—well, the twin switch was over and done. It had to be. He burst through the door without knocking and stopped short. Lary Goen sat on the bed, one foot immersed in a bowl of steaming water.

"What the—!"

The ballplayer looked up and glowered.

"Stepped on a stone looking for a sliced drive," he said morosely. "I'll be lucky to be able to play baseball for three or four days. And Pop informed me—you, he thought—to lay off the column needling for a while because Mike Harrigan is in town to give me the double-o!"

He laughed without mirth.

"Swell time to have a big league scout come to look me over with you showing in my spot! I'll get the discredit for all the lousy plays you

make!"

Cary Goen slumped to the bed. "You can't play! I'll have to go through with it!" He moaned. "And the big brass here from Boston to see me!"

He handed his twin the phone memo.

*Caller.....Mr. A. J. Bryan
For.....Mr. Cary Goen
Message.....Mr. Bryan wants
you on urgent business, Expects
you to take dinner with him.
Call him at Park-Plaza.*

"Bryan is the personnel manager for Interstate Papers. There is an opening on the sport staff of a big metropolitan newspaper in the chain and Bryan may want to interview me for the job. But the worst of this deal is that I'll give you a black eye with Harrigan!"

Cary Goen's tone dripped misery. Lary gazed at his twin in commiseration.

"The only thing to do is to call off the whole silly business," the ballplayer said. Funny how they each thought of the other when the chips were really down. "Thing we've got to do now is to fix it so you can do your stuff with Mr. A. J. Bryan."

"And how will that ride with Harrigan? Look, Lary, he must know your record. He probably just wants to look you over for size and throwing arm and such. Well, we've always been the same size. And I can throw as good as you, even"—Cary Goen grinned crookedly then suddenly straightened but added, "—if I don't happen to throw to the right place! I'll clinch a bid to the Sox for you."

"Sure! And I'll clinch things for you with Bryan—the same way. So he'll fire you instead of handing you a promotion!"

A rap on the door stopped whatever Cary Goen was going to say. The sports writer went to the door. A keen-eyed man with a smartly trimmed mustache stood in the corridor.

"I'm looking for Mr. Cary Goen,"

he said. "My name is Bryan. The desk clerk was unable to get a response from your room on the phone but he was sure you were in. You are Cary Goen?"

"Come right in, Mr. Bryan." Cary Goen threw a warning glance at his twin. "I was just leaving. The character with his foot in the water is the man you're looking for."

Cary Goen closed the door and trudged gloomily toward the elevator.

POP DONNELLY looked up from his place on the dugout bench as the big man with the ruddy complexion and the wizened, sharp-featured man with him came down the step. Pop jerked a sharp look at the red-faced man. He said, "Hello, Mike." Then to the smaller man, "Hello, Scotty."

"How's it going, Pop?" Mike Harrigan's voice boomed. "Ran into Scotty here and thought as long as we was both scoutin' a couple of your boys, we'd come down and say hello and let everybody see that everything is on the up-and-up."

Pop scowled. It was not like Mike Harrigan to pull a stunt like this. The veteran Sox scout realized that for a young ballplayer to know that he was being looked over by a big league scout could well be poison. Mike always went to great lengths to keep his presence at a ballpark strictly on the q. t. so any player he was scouting would be loose and natural.

Mike chuckled. "Scotty's got a suspicious nature," he said. "He won't believe that I'm scouting the man you're playing in right field, Pop."

The veteran manager's eyes narrowed a little as he looked at the Sox scout. What was going on? Mike Harrigan knew well enough that his right fielder would never be big league timber.

"Mike Harrigan," Pop said. "What the devil are you trying to—"

"Am I still hitting in the fifth slot, Pop?"

The words that cut through Pop's question to Mike Harrigan came

from a ballplayer who stuck his head around the corner of the dug-out. Then Cary Goen saw the ruddy-faced man and he openly stared. Mike Harrigan, Pop Donnelly had called this guy—and he was the same gent who had been up in the pressbox last night. Harrigan had seen Lary play. What gave, anyway?"

"You're Goen, ain't you?" Harrigan said. "The boy Pop thinks might have it in a year or two. Well, son, you want to put out tonight. This gentleman with the mustard colored suit is none other than Scotty Eaton, the famous Red Bird scout."

Cary Goen grinned automatically as he shook hands with Scotty Eaton. He was wondering what Harrigan was trying to pull. He did not see the quick sharp stare that Mike Harrigan gave him. He wondered why Harrigan suddenly chuckled aloud.

Pop Donnelly burned and sizzled inside. Damn and blast Mike Harrigan! He oughta remember that the Red Birds had first call on any player on his club to fill out a pitcher deal made earlier in the season! If Scotty Eaton got a glimmer of suspicion that Harrigan was remotely interested in Goen, he'd grab the kid. And Pop Donnelly would lose a nice bundle of cash.

"Scram!" Pop said abruptly to the scouts. "The both of you. There's a league rule prohibiting anybody but ballplayers to be in a dugout durin' a ballgame. The ump is gettin' ready to call it, so scram!"

A. J. BRYAN leaned back in his chair beside the man he thought was Cary Goen and pondered the vagaries of the genus homo. How was a man to figure this youngster? You might discount his lack of poise, the nervousness he had exhibited at dinner. But Goen was just as fumbling and unsure here in the press box, the atmosphere of his work. A man like this would never do for a big metropolitan paper.

Odd, too. Goen's stuff had been clever. Especially about that rookie. Goen, wasn't it? Goen. Suddenly the

personnel manager for Interstate Papers leaned forward, said to Lary Goen, "Is that Goen down there on the field any relation of yours?"

"We're twins," Lary mumbled. He was watching his twin down on the field and he suppressed a groan as Cary Goen showed more and more ineptness.

Cary Goen was not cheering himself. As a ballplayer, he was a good sports writer. The first time he had gone to bat the pitcher had tried to work him and he had not taken his bat off his shoulder. He drew a walk. Then he was promptly picked off first base by a snap throw from the catcher. The second time at bat there were men on first and second and the pitcher did not fool. Cary Goen struck out on three pitches, waving weakly for the third strike after the ball was in the catcher's mitt.

In the field he had caught one simple flyball in the first inning and then two innings later had overrun a drive that Lary would have caught in his hip pocket, messed it up thoroughly, and heaved the ball into the stands as enemy baserunners raced merrily around the paths. Pop relieved him the next inning.

After the game, Pop Donnelly stopped in front of Goen's locker. The veteran manager's expression was glum. It was a cinch that Mike Harrigan would not want Goen after the exhibition he had given tonight. Nor Eaton, either.

"We're wanted in the press box," Pop growled.

Cary nodded. He was plenty low. The least he could do was to make a clean breast of this clambake, take all the blame, try to square Lary with Mike Harrigan.

Lary Goen, Bryan, and a red-faced man were waiting in the press box. Cary winced as he shook hands with A. J. Bryan. He had probably cooked his own goose with Bryan. Mike Harrigan chuckled and the sports writer glared at the scout. Why in thunder did Harrigan look as smug and satisfied as a pitcher who had just hurled a no-hit game?

Harrigan winked at the sports

writer and drew a folded paper from his pocket, still chuckling. He handed the paper to Lary Goen.

"Like to have you sign that," the Sox scout said. "Think you'll find we're generous as to terms for an untried rookie."

Lary Goen stared dazedly at the paper as he unfolded it. CONTRACT WITH SOX BASEBALL COMPANY was lettered across the top in big black type. Pop Donnelly stared at Harrigan open-mouthed. Had his old teammate gone off his rocker? Offering a contract to a sports writer!

A. J. Bryan shot a keen look around the group. He smelled something. This was not the first time that someone had tried to pull a fast one on him. But they rarely got away with it. He snatched the paper from the ballplayer's hand. No bush-league operator was going to sign *his* man under A. J. Bryan's nose. He hastily glanced over the contract.

"But this is a contract to play baseball for the Sox," he cried. "Goen is a newspaperman, not a ballplayer!"

"That's what you think!" Harrigan boomed. He turned to Pop Donnelly. "I've outsmarted the Red Bird chain gang again! Scotty Eaton fell hook, line, and sinker. He's going to take that glass-armed right fielder you got, Pop. He's convinced he's the man I was after!"

Harrigan chuckled.

"I've been following this boy for quite a while, Pop. Sneaking looks at him when I knew he didn't know I was around and wasn't under pressure. He's got a lot to learn but he's got what it takes basically. I've been set to sign him since last night.

"Today when I ran into Scotty Eaton, I figured he was trailing me. I didn't want Goen to look especially good tonight so I pulled that act of coming down to the dugout to make sure all your boys would know a couple of scouts were catching their play. I wanted Goen to tighten up and maybe look not so good."

HARRIGAN'S chuckle graduated into the guffaw class.

"I didn't count on the thing working out like it did, but after I knew that the twins had switched, did I get a bang out of watching you squirm while the sports writer fell all over himself, Pop!"

Lary and Cary jerked quick glances at each other then as though on a common swivel their eyes turned to Mike Harrigan. A. J. Bryan leveled a forefinger at Cary Goen.

"Are you the Goen who writes sports for the *Gazette*," he demanded.

"Yes sir." Cary Goen gulped. Nobody had ever accused him of not being able to think fast. He saw a slim chance for an out and he grabbed it. "I'm sorry, sir. I should have wised you up to the plot when you came to my room and caught us in the middle of planning the switch, but—well, you see, sir, it was an opportunity to get a new angle for the column feature stuff and I'd had a tough time persuading Lary to go along with the idea. I didn't dare risk missing out on it."

"I understand perfectly," Bryan said. He had been around and he had a strong feeling that there was more to this than young Goen was putting out. But a nimble wit was an asset to a newspaperman and this youngster did not lack assurance. He said a bit drily, "A good newspaperman takes no chances in spoiling his yarn when he's after a story. Come with me, young man. We have some talking to do."

Pop Donnelly looked more than a little befuddled. He eyed Lary Goen and then eyed Mike Harrigan. The ballplayer was looking at the big scout and puzzlement held the youngster's eyes.

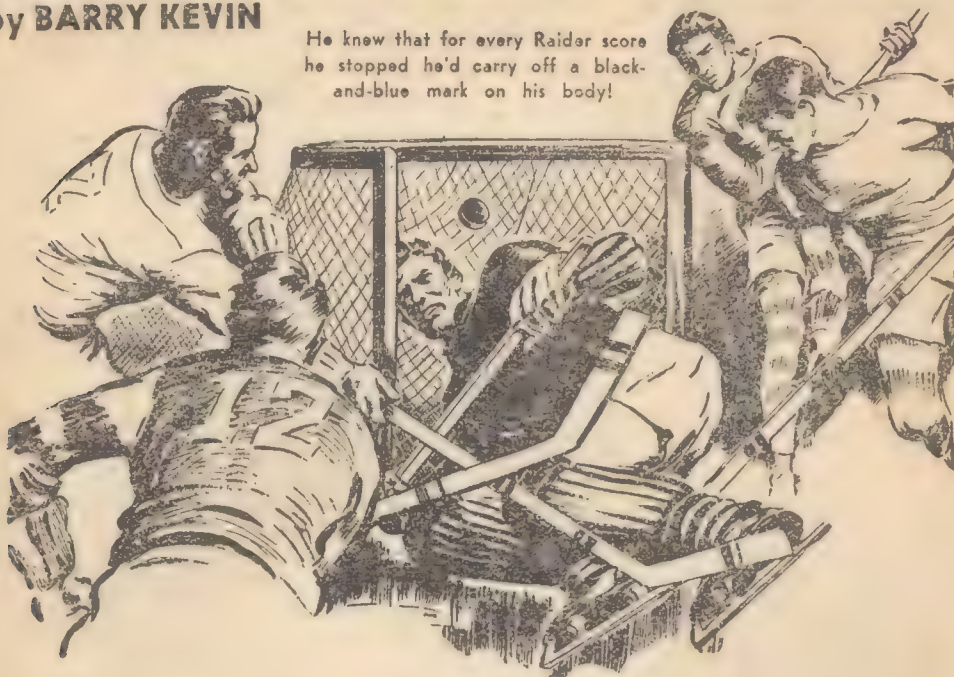
"Everything's turned out swell," Lary Goen said. "Just one thing, Mr. Harrigan: you said you knew that Cary and I had pulled the switch. Outside of mother and dad, you're the only person who ever tumbled to our act. How did you tell us apart?"

A broad grin split Harrigan's rud-
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BLAZING BLADES

by BARRY KEVIN

He knew that for every Raider score he stopped he'd carry off a black-and-blue mark on his body!



A youngster hero - worship a punk puck - pusher like Willie Titus? So what would the kid think when he finally saw Willie out on the ice, fearfully facing - off against the bone - crushing Bearcats?

WILLIE TITUS crouched in his defense position awaiting the face-off. The ref dropped the puck, there was a melee of tangled sticks, and the rubber biscuit came shooting back into Black Hawk territory.

Doug Driscoll, Hawk forward, scooped it up and slanted for Raider ice. Willie wheeled around behind him and followed him over the blue line, riding low over his skates as he backed up the play cautiously. His eyes darted back and forth across the ice ahead of him, as he tried to keep tabs on the puck and the enemy Raiders at the same time.

Driscoll's rangy frame was suddenly slammed back onto the scarred ice as he ran into a bone-crunching bodycheck by Hub Kohler, Raider

defense ace. The puck went skittering free.

Willie pushed after it. From the front, a Raider wing pivoted and came boring in. Out of the corner of his eye, Willie saw Red Haines, the Black Hawks' left wing, also rushing in to grab the rubber. Willie pulled up to let Haines take it, figuring to give him cover as he went down-ice.

The Raider wing-man got the puck instead. His stick flashed out a fraction of a second ahead of Haines', hooking the rubber in. A shower of ice spray shot up into Willie's face, and the Raider was off toward the Hawk goal. Willie scrambled desperately to throw a bodycheck into the man, but he was too late. Too late, too, he realized that the puck should have been his, that he should

have been on it and away, instead of holding back and waiting for Haines to take it. Disconsolately, he pivoted and trailed in the ruck of the play. He had been afraid.

The Raider, with open and undefended ice between him and the Hawk net, swooped down on the tense Hawk goalie. Shifting his stick back and forth like a darting snake's tongue, he swung it for a shot at the cage. The thick-set goalie brought his stick out to intercept the puck. But it didn't come. The shot was a feint, the puck remaining in front of the Raider, a slithering black speck. The goalie had committed himself too soon. Another lightning-like stick stroke, and the disc went flying into the wicket to bulge the cords and set the buzzer squawking for a Raider score.

Willie's heart sank. Inwardly, he blamed himself for the score. Not only had he muffed his chance at the puck, but he had left his defense zone wide open. He wondered what quirk it was in him that hoodooed him, that made him always foul up in the clutch. His eyes avoiding those of his circling teammates, he skated slowly to position for the new face-off.

This was Willie's second season with the Hawks. The first had been a good one, if unspectacular. But Willie was beginning to wonder if he hadn't just been lucky. You know how it goes, sometimes you can coast along for quite a spell dodging all the pinches, with Fate never putting you to the test. You can look good on surface flash, until something happens to scratch through to your true color. It seemed to Willie that the law of averages was piling up on him this year—those narrow clutch spots had been coming thick and fast. And Willie was finding the going rough, so rough that he was feeling shaky about his berth in pro hockey.

Doug Driscoll skated close to him and murmured, "Let's get going in there, kid."

Willie flashed him a look, tight-lipped. "Sure, Doug, sure." The remark seemed innocent—it could have been directed to the players at

large, but Willie felt that Driscoll was also singling him out for the blame on the point. If he could have chopped a hole in the ice with his skates and dropped through it, he would have.

The game whirled into action again, and Willie forgot his self-doubts momentarily in the heat and swirl of play.

But the loss of the point proved fatal. Already 3-2, in the middle period, the Raider lead held to 4-3 when the final buzzer signalled the game's end.

Willie trailed behind the others as they trooped over the cork runway to the showers. Nobody spoke to him as he sat pulling off his togs, but there was none of the usual locker-room persiflage among any of the men. They were a pretty depressed lot. The Raiders had just ousted them from first place in the NHL. While second place left them in the running for the Cup playoffs, it also made them good prospects for elimination. Willie felt that the team's gloom was directed straight at him.

THERE WAS only one thing that could make Willie feel better. That was the sight of Carol Lee, the slim, pert little brown-eyed girl who was the center of his life outside hockey, and the object of his romantic hopes.

As he left the building exit, he saw her waiting for him. It was snowing, and she was standing there with the white flakes coming down and lighting on her blue coat, or melting in her hair. He took her arm.

"Hello, dream stuff," he said softly. She looked around, and he bent his head to rub his nose against hers. The curtain of snow cut them off from the rest of the world.

"Willie—" She smiled at him, but dodged away quickly. Then Willie noticed a boy, a lighthaired kid of about fifteen, watching them.

"Willie, this is my brother, Sandy. I brought him to see the game tonight."

Willie grinned at the kid: "Hi,

Sandy. I thought you were at military school." Carol had often spoken to Willie of the kid brother she was supporting out of her earnings as a secretary. Their parents had died years before.

"Naw, I left there," Sandy said. The faint note of bitterness in the boy's tone caught Willie's notice, but he forgot it in the pleasure of being with Carol.

"Want to come along and have a late supper with us, Sandy?" Willie asked him.

"No thanks. I guess you an' Carol wanta be alone. I can get home by myself O.K." Sandy pulled a hand out of the pocket of his blazer and thrust it at Willie. "Glad to meet ya, Mr. Titus."

Willie gripped his hand. "I'll be seeing you, Sandy."

Sandy turned and left them. Willie felt a little funny. There had been no need for the kid to rush away. Being alone with Carol was a desirable condition, but Willie would have liked the chance to get acquainted with her brother. He turned to the girl.

"Well—it looks like we're stuck with each other for the evening, doesn't it?"

There was the line of a slight frown between Carol's eyes, but she laughed and it disappeared.

Willie took her to a little place where they could relax to soft music, dance a bit, and talk. It was while they were sitting at their table listening to a muted trumpet blow a solo on one of their favorite tunes that Willie reached over and laid his big paw over Carol's little hand.

"What d'you say we set a date, Carol?" he said, speaking past a sudden lump in his throat. He thought she was looking very beautiful at that moment.

Carol looked at him, her eyes going wide for an instant, as if Willie had startled her. Then she let her glance drop to the tablecloth, which she began to tug at nervously with her free hand.

"Oh, Willie—I wish you hadn't asked me that just now. I—" She stopped.

Willie tightened his clasp. "Hey,

what is this?" he joked. "Some other guy cutting in on me—beating my time?"

Carol smiled wryly. "Well—maybe you could say that, in a way."

Willie had a flash of intuition. "Oh—it's Sandy, isn't it? Your brother. Well, forget about it. Whatever you've been doing for him, I can continue to do, and gladly. Let me take on the responsibility."

Carol sighed. "I wish it were that simple."

"Well, isn't it?"

"No. —It isn't just a question of money, Willie. It's Sandy, himself. I'm losing touch with him. You saw how he ran off tonight. He seems to think he isn't wanted, or something. He's getting to be old enough so he feels guilty about taking money from me, and—" She paused.

Willie sensed what was coming. "And?"

"Well—I think he's gotten hold of some pretty wild ideas about where he's going to get money of his own. He's been running out pretty late since he came back from military school, and I'm afraid he's in bad company."

"I see. Yeah, and I think I understand, too," Willie said. You're afraid of what might happen if you pulled out on him and got married. But I'd offer Sandy a home, Carol—you know that."

"Sandy wouldn't accept it. I couldn't take the chance," Carol said.

"Maybe if I got to know the kid first—"

"That's why I brought him to the game with me tonight, Willie," I thought maybe if he saw you play he'd—well, you know how kids that age are—sometimes they'll hero-worship an older fellow. Especially an athlete. I thought that might pull him away from the—the others."

Willie felt a sharp, sick stabbing of guilt. A kid hero-worship him? After the way he had played tonight? Even in the stands, it must have been evident that he'd blown the game. It looked like it hadn't been only the team he had let down by his fumbling play. It had been Carol,

too, and a youngster at a crossroads in his life. Willie sat looking down in front of him, dumbly. His hand slid off Carol's.

"Sandy didn't go for me, did he, Carol?"

"I don't know, Willie— Maybe if I keep taking him to the games."

"Sure, Carol, sure." A heavy depression settled over him. Everything was going to pieces in front of him. "Let's go, huh?"

Willie took her uptown to the apartment where she lived with her brother. He went in with her. Sandy was not there. Apparently he had not come home after leaving them. Willie felt that it was his fault, too. If he had not dragged Carol away—

He saw the shadow in her eyes as he bent to kiss her goodnight. Her response was brief and preoccupied. Willie went out and stood leaning with his back against the closed door. There was a lump of lead in his insides. He had felt very sure of Carol, and he was losing her.

THE TEAM swung out of town to wind up the season prior to the Cup playoffs. Willie thought maybe getting away from his worries about Carol and her brother might help his playing. But the worries rode right with him.

They were in Boston, playing the third-place Bearcats, when Willie found out how it was going to be.

The game was a whirlwind on ice from the moment the puck bounced on the ice for the first face-off. Tige Trampas, the Bearcat center, hooked the rubber and shoveled it out to Heinie Krause, Boston's fast, aggressive leftwing forward. They called Krause "The Hun," and Willie knew how he had earned his tag when he came swooping across the blue line, the spearhead of a three-man drive that was like a blitz assault.

Willie threw himself forward to meet the charge. He expected Krause to get rid of the puck by passing. But Krause held it glued to the crook of his stick as he raced forward, his body inclined at a steep angle over his skates. Willie tried to

jar him loose from it with a hard bodycheck. At the last instant, Krause passed to his right, then threw his shoulder down to meet Willie's block. The two of them crashed and spilled to the ice.

Meanwhile, tall Hi Taylor, Krause's mate in the Bearcat forward line, had caught the pass and was wheeling toward the cage. Doug Driscoll bored in from his defense territory, forcing Taylor to a shot. Heavy Davis, the Hawk goalie, made a save with his outthrust knee, and cleared to Driscoll, who fought past the pokechecking Bearcats and took the puck out of danger.

Willie Titus picked himself up off the ice, shaken to his skatelaces. Driscoll had saved his hide on that one.

The play raged up to the Bearcat goal, Willie tailing along nervously, trying to keep in defensive position. Then, swiftly, the tide was sweeping back over him again, Krause and Taylor bearing down on him abreast, shuttling the biscuit between them. Willie backchecked. He slashed with his stick, trying to get a piece of the rubber. The two men overbore him. Willie lost his sense of direction momentarily and went crashing backwards into the boards. His skates went out from under him, and his head bounced against the ice. Out of blurred eyes, Willie saw Driscoll, Haines and Link Hanna, the Hawk center, rushing in. But the whole Bearcat team seemed to have swept over Willie's fallen body in the wake of their forwards, and were now riding down in a tight bunch on the Hawk goalie.

The packed masses in the stands went crazy as the Bearcats went in and bombarded the hapless Davis like half-a-dozen guys all throwing rubber at once. The goalie didn't have enough arms and legs to stop all the shots, and one got by him. The red light flashed on and somewhere underneath the tumult was the sound of the buzzer squalling out the news of a Bearcat score.

As Willie pushed his now aching body to his formation spot again, he

gritted his teeth and clenched his stick with a tighter grip. These Bearcats seemed to have marked him out as target for tonight. He'd have to get hold of himself.

But, it was only his conscious brain that concentrated on the hockey game before him. In the back of his mind, anxiety tugged at him, pulling him down, slowing him up. He was in Boston, playing a game—but in New York there was a kid playing a more deadly serious kind of game—a kid and his sleepless sister. In New York, playing his head off might conceivably have helped that kid—here in Boston, it was useless. Willie fought against a feeling of futility and frustration.

With that first score, the Bearcats had scented blood. The chance to move up into the Hawks' second-place spot lay shining before them, and it was obvious they meant to grab it. Willie battled them off desperately as they sent rush after rush through his side, but it was purely defensive play. He didn't have the strength for anything else. The Bearcats were held to their one score through the rest of the first period.

When the middle period opened, though, the Boston icemen, still headed by Krause and Taylor, swarmed back to the kill. It was plain now that they had tabbed Willie as the Hawks' weak link, and they were hammering on him without let-up. Willie felt scared, now.

Willie hung on, battered from the shock of body contact, and dazed with the speed of the play. He held up his defense job grimly, by dint of instinct. The end came for him when, in rushing in to break up a Bearcat jam around the goal, he found himself suddenly in possession of the puck, as a Bearcat try bounced off the goalie's pads, and Davis cleared to him.

Momentarily bewildered and tied in knots by all the things that were tugging at his mind, Willie hesitated. As he did so, Hi Taylor swept in and pokechecked the rubber right off his frozen stick. A lightning shot back past Davis' face caught the goalie by surprise, and all at

once it was 2-0 for the Bearcats.

A whistle blew as the sweating men lined up again, and a replacement from the B string came skating out to take Willie's place. Willie, feeling more alone than he ever had in his life, clambered over the boards onto the bench. He shivered as he pulled a blanket over his damp shoulders, for he knew that he was through in this game.

He knew that he was through for the season when the Black Hawks, unexpectedly stiffened by the substitute, revitalized and charged in on the Bearcats with a newly-inspired brand of offense which rang up a tally, then evened the score, then forged ahead to 3-2. The Bearcats were fighting like wild men at the end to get their lead back, but the Black Hawks, with Willie on the bench, held and won. To Willie, his own team's victory added up to a personal humiliation. The Hawks could look forward to meeting the Raiders in the playoffs now—but Willie would be watching from a choice seat on the sidelines.

WHEN THE team got back to New York, Willie's guess was confirmed. It was the substitute who went in with the A line-up for pre-game practice, which was as good as a written notice that he was washed up with the Hawks after this season. The guy who played for the Cup was the guy who would get the new contract. Whitey Blake, the Hawks' stocky manager, gave Willie the benefit of a brief "Sorry—" as he sent the squads out.

What bothered Willie more, however, was the condition he found Carol in upon his return. When he went to see her, she faced him with a white face and blue-circled eyes.

"Sandy?" Willie asked her.

She nodded. "He never comes home any more—even to eat. Just to sleep. And sometimes not then, until three or four o'clock in the morning."

"You don't know where he's been going?"

"No. He won't tell me anything.

I can't handle him, Willie. What am I going to do?"

"Does he have much money?"

Carol's hands twisted nervously. "I give him some. But he must be getting more somewhere—he's been buying new clothes and things."

Willie tried to calm her fears. "Maybe he's taken a job somewhere—working nights, maybe—and doesn't want to tell you about it."

"No." She shook her head. "I could tell if he had a job. He hasn't."

Willie couldn't help admitting to himself that he was disturbed, too. It wasn't likely that a kid like Sandy, with his bitter outlook, could just do nothing—not go to school, or not have a job—and keep out of trouble.

He grasped at a straw. "Here, take these—they're two box seats a tomorrow night's game at the Garden. This is the championship series. I'm sure Sandy wouldn't want to miss it. When he comes home, you show him these tickets. Tell him I'll be expecting him at the game." Even if he wasn't going to be playing himself, Willie hoped that the tickets might keep the kid occupied for a few evenings, at least. Maybe, in the meanwhile, he could find out something, think of some way to help.

Carol kissed him gratefully, but Willie could tell she didn't have too much confidence in the tickets.

The next night, at the Garden, Willie stepped outside the locker room before changing into his togs, to phone Carol.

"Hello?"

"Carol—it's me, Willie. Are you bringing Sandy to the game?"

"Oh—Willie!" Her voice was suddenly high-pitched and distraught. "No! Sandy wouldn't come. He said he had to meet somebody. We had a fight when I insisted, and he ran out."

Willie sighed. He hadn't believed his attempt would work.

Carol went on. "Willie—this time I'm really worried. I heard him talking to someone on the phone. He was saying something about carrying a gun. He hung up when I came in the room. Oh, Willie—if anything

happens—"

Willie's back stiffened at the mention of "a gun." This was getting serious, and no mistake. People could get killed with guns—maybe the kid himself.

"Carol—any idea at all where Sandy went?"

"No—no!"

Willie thought hard for a moment, his mouth clamped tight. Then he said, "Look, Carol. Go through all his things. Make a pile of everything you find. I'll be there in ten minutes."

"But what about the game—"

Willie hung up. Well, what about the game? He wasn't slated to play anyhow, except in an emergency. And this was a bigger one. Let Whitey Blake rage—Willie had other business tonight. He went past the locker room door and out of the building at a run.

Willie clutched Carol to him briefly as he entered her apartment. "Did you find anything?" he asked her.

"Not much." She gestured toward the table.

There was a little pile of odds and ends there. Willie ran through it. A couple of half-empty packs of cigarettes. A bottle opener. A soiled handkerchief. Some loose change. Several match folders. And a small knob which looked like it had come off the dashboard of a car.

Willie held up the knob. "Any idea where this came from?"

Carol shook her head. Willie put it in his pocket thoughtfully. Then he examined the match folders. They were all different, and might have come from almost anywhere—except two of them, which had the name "Naughty Angel Club" printed on the outside, and an address on Northern Long Island.

"Two of these folders from this Naughty Angel place. Looks like he's been going there regularly. I guess that's the place to start looking." He started for the door.

"Willie—take me with you."

"No, Carol," he flung back over his shoulder. "Stay here. I'll phone you as soon as I can."

WILLIE GRABBED a cab, handed the driver a twenty-dollar bill, and told him to find the Naughty Angel. After driving around for over an hour on the North Shore of Long Island, they finally found the place. It was located in a little hollow off the main highways, and was surrounded by parked cars, mostly jalopies. Loud music blared from the inside. Willie sized it up as a typical teen-age hangout, the kind of joint that specialized in serving liquor to minors.

Telling the cabbie to wait, Willie got out and went inside. He pulled his hat down over his eyes and sat down at a table near the door. A three-piece band was thumping out a popular tune at one end of the room, where a few adolescent couples were jitter-bugging. A juke-box was going at the other end. Willie looked around, examining the faces.

His hand in his pocket turned the dashboard knob over and over between his fingers. That knob bothered him. Carol didn't own a car, and as far as he knew, Sandy didn't have access to any. That knob came off somebody else's car.

Willie didn't see Sandy in the room. He looked around for signs of the manager, or whoever ran the place. There was a tough-looking character dressed in a dinner jacket, like the band, standing near the door. But he didn't look like the owner.

On a hunch, Willie got up and went back outside. He stepped into the shadow of the building, and started walking slowly down the line of parked cars.

He had to go between a couple of them to get through, and it was as he did so that he heard Sandy's voice. He froze, crouched over.

"It ain't enough," Sandy was saying. "You said you'd pay eight hundred for a new car."

"Four is the best I can do. This make is hard to camouflage. I'm takin' a big chance, buyin' hot cars from you punks. Take it or leave it."

Willie went rigid. His hunch had

been right—Sandy was stealing cars! Hot rage exploded inside him at the miserable human vultures that preyed on the weak judgment of kids this way.

"O.K., I'll take it," Sandy grumbled. "Gimme the dough."

"Inside," the man he was talking to said.

Willie saw the shadowy figures of Sandy and a medium-sized man in a dark suit detach themselves from the parked cars and head back for the building. He waited till they went in the door, then followed.

As he stepped inside, he saw Sandy and the racketeer step through the door of an office. He noticed the eye of the bouncer on him in sudden alertness as he strode across the room after them.

Willie pushed the door of the club office open and burst in just as the swarthy-faced man was counting out a pile of bills on the desk. As the two whirled to face him, he rushed up and swept the money to the floor.

"No, you don't, you rat!" he grated. The racketeer's face, glaring into his own, had gone white.

"Hold on a minute," the man said tightly. "What d'you think you're doing?"

"I heard what—" Willie started to say, then heard the swift rush of feet behind him. He pivoted in time to meet the bouncer in the dinner jacket charging at him.

Willie dropped low and swung a right which caught the oncoming man in the midriff. There was a grunt, then the man closed with him. Willie broke loose and heaved a looping left that caught the strong-arm on the side of the jaw. He sprawled backward to the floor.

Willie turned to his boss, now boiling with rage. He found himself looking into the black hole in the barrel of an automatic. He hesitated for a fraction of a second. Through his mind darted the thought that he could kiss his hockey career goodbye for sure if he let himself get shot up now. Then the remembrance of Carol's anguish and the thought of Sandy in the grip of

these criminals came to him, and anger swept over him in a red wave. He was through, anyhow.

Disregarding the menacing gun, Willie dived for the gangster's legs. A deafening explosion roared right in his ear, and then he was driving the man over backwards. The gangster's head hit against the floor. Willie raised up and slammed a clenched fist into his jaw. The mouth saged open, and the body went limp in unconsciousness.

Willie grabbed the automatic and whirled to face the bouncer. The other man was just getting up off the floor and reaching inside his coat for his own gun. When Willie covered him, he slowly withdrew his hand.

"Sandy—get his gun," Willie said. The open-mouthed youngster obeyed. He laid the gun on the top of the desk. Then Willie reached for the phone and called for the police.

In ten minutes the cops had arrived and slapped the two mobsters under arrest. Willie had obtained the keys of the stolen car from Sandy, and turned them over to the police. Taking Sandy with him, he headed for the cab, which was still waiting. When the police had come, Willie had ordered the scared Sandy to wait for him outside.

"Gee," Sandy said, as the cab pulled out and headed back toward the city. "Why'nt you turn me in too?"

"I'm taking you back to your sister," Willie said. "That's where you belong."

As the cab sped along the highway, Willie turned to the kid again and said, "By the way, you don't happen to have a gun on you, do you?"

Sheepishly, Sandy reached inside his jacket and pulled out an old-make revolver. He handed it over silently. Willie rolled down the cab window and tossed it out into the ditch.

WILLIE entered the locker room at the Garden the next night and made his way toward his locker without looking at any of the

men. He had read in the papers that the Hawks had lost to the Raiders the night before, in the first game of the series. In those same papers, his teammates had plenty of opportunity to learn where Willie had been. He blushed as he remembered the headlines.

"HOCKEY STAR K.O.'S HOT-CAR MOBSTERS" had shouted at him from the front page.

"Ice hockey fans who missed Battling Bill Titus in last night's game at Madison Square Garden, may be consoled to know that Titus was busy—cleaning up single-handed a stolen car ring which has scourged Long Island for months. Using only his fists, while two armed criminals shot at him with guns, Titus subdued and held them until police arrived, when he turned them over, together with evidence of their crimes." The story went on with paragraphs of lurid details, praising him for quick thinking and acting.

That tag, "Battling Bill" Titus, was something new to Willie. The sportwriters had never called him that. Some cub on the story must have gotten carried away. It gave Willie a funny feeling—but a good one.

Willie noticed a few curious glances from his team-mates, but nobody said anything. Whitey Blake had posted the starting lineup, and it was the same as the night before, with the B stringer filling Willie's spot. He was still on the bench. But on the other hand, Blake said nothing to him about his absence the night before.

It was when the team poured out onto the blue ice a few minutes before the game time that Willie got the surprise. For there, hanging from the balcony railings, right along with the three or four big stars' names, was his name, TITUS, spelled out in huge block letters on a bright silk banner. The banner was obviously brand new.

Willie circled about the ice in the warm-up period, his emotions in a turmoil. He didn't know what to make of the banner. It was the first time the fans had noticed him. But

he hadn't won the attention on the hockey rink.

Otherwise, everything was as usual, except that the crowd seemed even larger and noisier. The warning buzzer sounded, and Willie skated off the ice to take his place on the bench with the rest of the reserves.

The players fell into formation, and the ref dropped the puck in the circle. Link Hanna slapped it and Red Haines picked it up. The Hawks surged over the Raider blue line in a wave. The way they were starting, it looked as though they meant to get that previous night's loss back.

The Raiders met them head-on. Skates spewed spray from the ice, and sticks rattled. A furious scuffle around the goal put the rubber in Raider possession, and they sent a wedge down deep into Hawk territory.

Willie's replacement, on the defense line, backchecked futilely. The Raiders shuttled the puck back and forth like a pea under a shell. The B stringer charged, and was dumped neatly on his collar-bone, while the Raider forward darted through unscathed.

Heavy Davis fended hurriedly, and warded off the Raider threat. In a matter of seconds they came storming back. They poured through the Hawk defense like water through a sieve.

Willie found himself getting tense as he watched. If he had been a weak link in the line, the sub was no better!

The sub had guts, though. He plowed into those Raider puck-raggers, blocking them back onto their heels, smashing bodycheck after bodycheck into them.

He went in swinging as the Raider center swept down on him. There was a swift skirmish as he fought for the puck. Sticks swung hard amid a tangle of legs. Suddenly a whistle blew and two angry men faced each other on the ice. The Hawk sub drew a five-minute penalty for high-sticking.

The B stringer came stumbling up to the penalty box red-faced and cursing under his breath.

The penalty proved serious. The Raiders, outmanning the Hawks now by one man, rode roughshod over the remaining opposition. Heavy Davis was snowed under with more work than he could handle in the cage, and three minutes later a scoop shot from right in front of the crease flicked past him for a score.

Willie saw Whitey Blake eyeing the clock nervously. In two minutes the B stringer's penalty would be up, and he could go back in the game. Willie found himself wishing desperately he could get out there and throw himself against that Raider's juggernaut. But he knew Whitey Blake was a man who didn't change his mind easily.

Then it started. First it was just a few scattered voices, yelling in the midst of all the other yelling. But other voices took it up, and as the five minutes neared an end, it became a swelling, roaring chant.

"Titus! Titus! We want Titus!" the fans were yelling.

IT WAS ridiculous, Willie knew. A little newspaper publicity, and the fans thought he was a fury on ice. But still, it sent a hitherto unknown thrill of pride racing through him.

"Titus. Titus! We want Titus!" the crowd roared. If only it could help.

Willie saw Whitey Blake looking at him. He felt his own face light up with eagerness and a thirst for battle that he had never known before. He half rose from his seat. Slowly, Whitey Blake nodded.

The five minutes ended, and Willie leaped from the bench and darted out onto the ice. The fans sent up a great echoing cheer as they saw Willie was going into the game.

Play started, and Willie threw himself into violent action. A Raider five-man rush engulfed him, but Willie threw a bodycheck into the puckcarrier which jarred him loose from the rubber. Willie bounced off him and saw the puck spurting free for an instant. Recovering without a lost movement, he reached out and snared it. Swiveling around, Willie

headed for Raider ice with most of the Raider team behind him. He dug his skates into the firm ice and sprinted for the Raider goal, dribbling the puck ahead of him.

As he skated, his blade-strokes seemed to form a rhythm in his mind. "*Battling Bill. Battling Bill. Battling Bill.*" It was a way he had never thought of himself before, and it was exhilarating. It made him feel like battling.

Up above, the fans were screaming. "Titus! Titus!"

It was Willie's imagination, but in all that yelling, he thought he could hear Carol's voice—and Sandy's. They were looking up to him now, and he meant to give them their money's worth. He had always been afraid of the crowd before—but now there was no question. They were on his side.

The fast Raider skaters overtook Willie just as he came within shooting distance of the goal. Big Hub Kohler, the rugged Raider defenseman, hurled his body at Willie for a vicious check.

Willie sucked the puck in close, lowered his shoulders and plowed on through. The shock as Kohler hit him shook him from teeth to toenails, but he kept his skates on the ice, and his stick on the rubber, and fired a shot at the corner of the net. Then he lost his balance and went sailing headfirst to crash up against the boards behind the cage. But the raucous noise of the sounder and the intensified hysterical screaming of the fans told him that he had made it.

He picked himself up and made his way back to the face-off position. As he did so, Red Haines skated alongside him and said, "Nice going, Titus." Haines had spoken to him but rarely before.

Doug Driscoll slapped his rump and said, "Attaboy, soldier." Driscoll had always called him "kid."

The others glided by and spoke to him one by one.

The score was now evened, and as Willie crouched waiting for the face-off to break, he felt sure and solid in his defense spot. No more

Raider scores would get through him, he felt very sure.

And no more did. Doug Driscoll corded one for the Hawks in the middle period, making the score 2-1, and that was the way the game ended. Willie knew he'd carry off the ice a black-and-blue mark for every Raider score he had stopped, but he didn't care.

As he clambered up the runway with his teammates, he heard a girl's voice yelling. "Willie!"

He glanced up at the parapet, and there, hanging over the railing were Carol and Sandy. Willie raised his glove to wave at them. Then he saw Sandy turn to his sister.

"Gee, whiz, sis. Don't call him Willie. Call him Bill!"

Willie knew then that he had scored a double victory. "You tell 'em, kid!" he hollered back.

THE KING OF SWAP

(Continued From Page 37)

dy face and he chuckled.

"Got into the habit of noticing tipoffs when I played ball," he said. "Started a lot of twin killings by spotting when the hit-and-run sign was out for the other team. Little things."

The chuckle again threatened to become a guffaw. He reached out a finger and touched the cheek of the ballplayer.

"No dimple when you grin," he said. "No tiny scar. Your brother has. Little things. Man gets so he notices."

Lary Goen stared in admiration. Pop Donnelly eyed the scout then the ballplayer. Pop scowled in mock anger.

"Yeah," he said. "Little things. Like the half-buck you owe me, Lary! I was wise all the time this morning—yeah, I saw the little things like a blind umpire! But you owe me for the two holes I was up on you, and Scotty Eaton outsmarted himself."

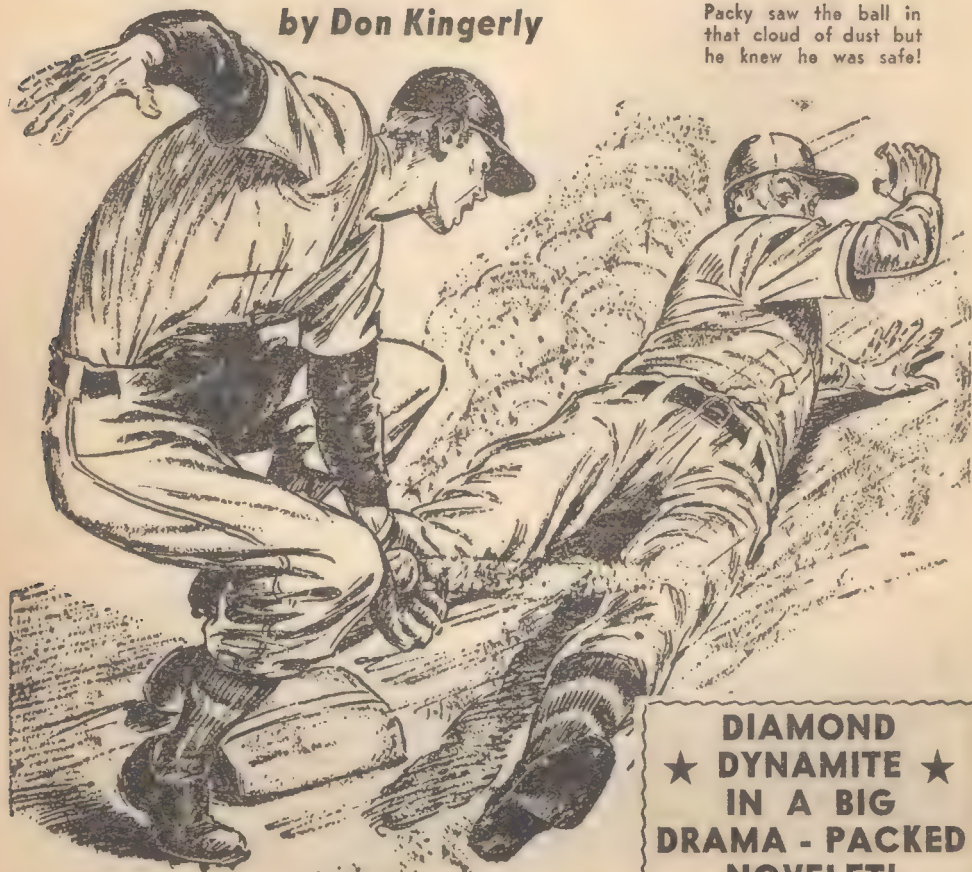
Pop's leathery face broke into a wide grin.

"Guess it ain't such a bad twin killing at that," he said.

LAST CHANCE FOR GLORY

by Don Kingerly

Packy saw the ball in that cloud of dust but he knew he was safe!



**DIAMOND
★ DYNAMITE ★
IN A BIG
DRAMA - PACKED
NOVELET!**

CHAPTER I

PACKY DONOVAN stood near the dugout and he could smell the hate. It had a heavy, malignant odor, and the bright morning sun and the cool wind that blew across the field were not able to dispel it.

He moved to the water cooler and the hate went with him as he walked,

like a clinging fog. He turned and looked across the diamond at the Bear team going through spring practice, and his eyes were sharp despite the years behind them.

Then he went into the shade of the dugout and sat down. He glanced briefly at his first base coach. "Bring them in, Mr. Swanson," he said, using the "Mister" with cold formality.

Harry Mills had taken the ballplayers no other manager could handle, the outlaws and the wild men, and he'd molded them into six-time world champions. Could Packy Donovan take the place now of this greatest diamond pilot of them all?

Marty Swanson ducked out into the bright glare of the Florida sunlight and yelled at the players. Packy watched them come in, and he thought, *You made the choice. It was your decision, and now you've got to see it through.*

That's how the books balanced. That was the story. You look back over the years of baseball war and it's all a bright streak of color splashed across memory, and then suddenly it's gone and you're an old man with only one left of the three beautiful things you once had.

Speed, strength, and toughness—the first two were gone with the sands of time, and the third had become stronger because the other two were missing.

Harman had known of that toughness, and Harman had put it to him honestly enough. The Bear owner had said, "They've gone to hades, Packy. On a red wagon. They had it once, under Harry Mills, and when he died they went to pieces. They're two years older now, Packy. That's all—but they've become soft. They've lost something inside them. They're lazy and full of false pride and they're living in a glory that's gone now."

Harman pawed at his mop of hair with a nervous hand, then said, "I want another pennant, Packy. I want another flag. Kenzie couldn't get it for me. Neither could Bronson. You get it—and you can write your own ticket. But get it!"

Harman had laid it down on the table like that—for Packy to look at. And Packy had taken it, because he loved the Bears and he wasn't getting any younger, and he didn't want to bow out without leaving a little of himself behind.

"I'll get your flag, Harman," he had told the owner. "We won't be soft any more when we get there—but we'll get there."

So that was it, for whatever it was worth. A barrel of tigers and a jug of lightning, and it could explode anytime, right in Packy's face.

He shook off his thoughts, and he stood up and went out to face the men who had come to hate him so much in five short weeks.

"You're soft," he said—and the ghost of Harry Mills shook its head in anger at his voice—"but you'll get hard. Around the field four times and then inside. Chalk talk in forty minutes. Lunch a half hour early again today. We're playing another intra-squad game this afternoon."

Pack looked at them, and said, "The two men who were out after 10 o'clock last night will find half their check missing this week. Do it again and I'll take the whole check."

He looked at their faces, saw Gantt, Fenton, English and Youngblood—and there was a sudden emptiness in his chest. "That's it," he said gruffly.

HE TURNED away and there was silence behind him. Dead-ly silence, silken and slick with menace. He turned back. They were still standing there.

"I believe you heard me, Mr. Swanson," he told the coach. "Take them around four times."

Gantt's curse was a crackle of lightning. Fenton slammed his glove viciously to the ground. Then they were stringing out on the long tour around the field, heads bobbing in rhythm and counter-rhythm, shoulders stiff with anger.

Packy watched them for a long moment, then turned to the clubhouse.

Harry Mills was the greatest manager of his time—perhaps the greatest the game ever knew. He gathered about him the fabulous men of the era—Donovan, Siverson, Fenton, English, Youngblood—and they were the Bears. They were the gargantuan men of baseball. And always there had been Harry Mills, the little man with the shy smile, the soft voice, never shouting, never threatening, always understanding and always seeming patiently tired under the strain of handling the mighty Bears.

Packy remembered them. He had been a veteran when most of them had come to the Bears. Siverson, the giant, a sentimental, hot-tempered extrovert. Fenton, the fiery and unpredictable speedster. English—temperamental and moody. They

were tremendous men, but only the hand of Harry Mills had been able to hold them together. Harry had taken the men nobody else could handle, the outlaws and the wild men, and he had molded them into a team that was in a class by itself. Six championships, with no other outfit ever even giving them a good scrap.

And then Harry Mills died, and it rained the day the Bears gathered to pay him honor. Siverson had looked up at the sky and wiped tears from his eyes with a huge fist—and they all knew somehow a dynasty had ended. And it was then that Packy Donovan had quit the game, because he wanted to go out while he was still, at 40, a great shortstop.

Another year, another race....

Old Ben Harman, the owner, had died the following spring after Harry Mills' death, and his son had taken over the team. A prototype of his father, with the same stooping shamble of a walk and the same unquenchable desire to win, young Harman had watched the Bears live pathetically in the glare of past glory that first year after Harry Mills' death. He had watched them break up and become the rebels again, the men no other team would touch with a long pole. Siverson had fought his way out of organized baseball because no manager could handle him. English had become the same wild man he had been before coming to the Bears. Fenton had slumped and lost his magic.

Harman brought in George Kenzy that first season after Harry's death. Kenzy had tried to run the team with the same soft and sure hand of Harry Mills.

But Kenzy wasn't Harry Mills, and the Bears knew it, and finally Kenzy knew it. In the end it became a little ludicrous to watch Kenzy try vainly to call back the ghost of the great man himself.

After Kenzy had failed, Ben Bronson had taken over. The Bears, the rebels of the league now, plummeted to the second division for the first time in over a decade. Young Harman watched the flame of glory

gutter and flare like a candle in the wind—and then the flame died. Harman, in desperation, called back the greatest player the Bears had ever had—Packy Donovan—to get another flag to match the ones old Ben Harman had willed to him.

The hand—or the fist. That had been the choice. And Packy had chosen the fist, because the memory of Kenzie and Bronson was a bitter thing to him.

Packy had been sure in his own mind what he must do. He had stepped off the train in Florida and met friendly grins with cold aloofness. He had lashed the Bears into it head-high, bucked them into it, drove and cursed and ripped them into it.

He met fire with fire. A few of them he fought, in the shadows of the stands after practice, and they carried the scars on their faces and the hate in their hearts.

There was an unbelievable anger in the Bears, and Packy stood braced against that anger, trying to guide the fire into the way they played baseball.

He drove the team. He searched with merciless eyes that found every falter of pace. The team became sullen and silent. Fenton, in a fit of anger, threw a baseball over the stands during an exhibition game in Alabama. When Fenton stalked off the field Packy met him. Later, in the dressing room, they fought, and Packy left him there, beaten and battered.

He raked them over the coals, fined them without mercy or feeling—and the wild, sullen temperamental mixture of great and talented men who were the Bears finally hated Packy Donovan so intensely that they forgot their own personal quirks.

Packy grinned, and took them home for the opening game of the season.

CHAPTER II

THE TIGERS came to town for the first one, and manager Flip Mooney chucked his batting order with Packy. "Welcome to

the brain department," he told Packy.

"I love you off the field, Flip," answered Packy, "but out here it's different. I wanted you to know before we started out."

Mooney grinned faintly. "I never expected anything else from you, old warhorse."

But there was a stiffness in Mooney's shoulders as he walked across the diamond to the Tiger dugout.

The umpire yelled in a hoarse voice and the stands rumbled in anticipation. In his private box behind the Bear dugout, young Harman waved at Packy and held one thumb up—old Ben's good luck sign when he owned the Bears.

It had started. The Bears were on the long road back to glory—but Packy knew lightning could strike here this bright spring afternoon.

Mooney had Kenny Martin, the money-pitcher, starting against the bears. Packy had chosen Gantt, the poker-faced left-hander.

The Tigers were up, and Gantt worked shrewdly. He got the first two batters on tricky curve balls they couldn't touch, and the third batter lofted a long fly that English took easily out in left field.

Youngblood led off for the Bears. Martin grooved his first pitch and Youngblood started his swing, then recovered without carrying it through. The umpire's hand went up in the strike sign.

Let's do it now, thought Packy. *Let's get it started.*

He swung out of the dugout, seethed towards the plate. He scuffed up a cloud of dust, shook his fists at the umpire. Youngblood looked surprised. Then he said evenly, "I can make my own gripes, manager."

Packy stopped short. So that's it, he thought. That's how it's going to be.

Packy looked at Youngblood, and there was something terribly hard in his face as he said, "That remark will cost you exactly one-hundred dollars, Mr. Youngblood."

Youngblood's face reddened in

anger. Packy stalked back to the dugout and sat down, aware of the silence around him.

At the plate, Youngblood, his face set in a savage mask, lashed out at Martin's next pitch. The ball rocketed into left field for a double.

English drove Youngblood home moments later with a screaming single down the third baseline.

Youngblood crossed the plate, trotted towards the dugout. There was faint mockery in his eyes when he looked at Packy. "You still want that money, manager?" the Bear player asked.

"It stands," said Packy evenly. He didn't want to say it, but he had to, knowing he was setting the pattern today. Youngblood looked at Packy for a long moment, then turned away.

For the next three innings Packy fought them openly. The hot-headed English booted one and tossed his glove away in disgust, and Packy sent in a sub for him. When English sat on the bench, Packy said, "You'll get to know this bench, English. You're going to spend a lot of time here."

FENTON WAS thrown out of the game in the fifth when he flared up at the umpire. Then Youngblood became moody, sullen, indifferent. The whole machine that was the Bears fell out of gear and stumbled.

The Tigers hopped all over Gantt in the sixth inning, and Packy had to send in Willow Young to put out the fire. Young was another Bear problem boy. He had been tossed aside by every team in the league, because he was as unpredictable as he was great. Then Harry Mills had taken Young and made him into the finest lefthander in the game.

Today Young was in the mood, and he spun his web around the Tigers for two innings. Then, just as suddenly, he walked two men, tossed a nothing ball that a Tiger batter immediately hit for a triple.

Young kicked up a cloud of dust and shouted at the Bear catcher. The catcher yelled back, and Young's

next pitch came in there wide, with nothing on it. The catcher lunged, missed the ball, and the third Tiger run came across the plate.

Packy watched them yell at each other—and then he yanked them both out of the game. After that he sat back and watched the Tigers slaughter his Bears 14-1. When it was over he let the team go inside. Packy sat on the bench for a while, trying to think his way clearly out of this thing.

These men were truly the rebels—the misfits, the sullen, temperamental, unpredictable misfits. Harry had done it with soft words—but Kenzie and Bronson had failed that way. Packy sat there, a blocky figure of a man with trouble on his mind then he stood up and went into the dressing room to face his team.

The air in the room was heavy and laden with hate and anger. Packy could feel the unrest in this room. He walked through the players and stood on a bench.

"They told me you were a gang of misfits," he said, "but I didn't see it that way, even when I played with you. I was one of you, then. But that's changed now. I'm running this team—and to me it looks like the scum of the league. I see now why Harry Mills was tired all the time, and I wonder how he lived as long as he did. You've got the talent to be the greatest team baseball ever knew. You were that, once. Now you're nothing, because there's no Harry Mills to hold you together."

Packy looked around the room, at the faces of his old teammates, and then he said evenly, "That's going to change now. From now on you won't have time to think about yourselves or anything else except baseball. I'm going to hound you and drive you and make you wish you were never born. And if you quit I'll ship you so far out of the league you'll wonder if there really is such a game as baseball.

"I'm going to fine you till you're broke, and you're going to wake up in the morning and go to sleep at night hating my guts. But you'll

play baseball for me—or wind up digging ditches."

Youngblood broke out of the group of players, then, his face twisted in anger. "You're not a manager, Donovan. You're a killer!"

Packy listened to the big player shout curses, and then he shouted, "I fine people who talk too much, Mr. Youngblood. I fine players for everything there is—except fighting."

YOUNGBLOOD came into Packy then, driving him backwards with a heavy shoulder. Packy twisted, regained his balance, then hit Youngblood savagely, once, twice, a third time. Youngblood reeled backwards and fell against a locker. Then he crumpled to the floor.

Packy thought for a moment they were all going to gang him. He held them at bay with hard eyes, and he walked through them to the door. There he turned and said, "I'm revoking the fine on Youngblood. Everybody else on the team draws a twenty-five dollar fine. That's for not having enough guts to pile into me a minute ago."

Packy turned to the team trainer. "Patch up Youngblood, trainer. He's starting at shortstop tomorrow."

Then Packy stuck his jaw out, put a tough grin on his face and walked out of the room, the hate behind him a live thing that followed him and crouched on his shoulder and breathed in his ear.

They moved after that. With Packy's iron will driving them, and no way to go but forward, the Bears played baseball. And Packy drove them, knowing if they hated him enough they would forget their own crazy, wild, unpredictable temperaments.

He was almost right. The Bears swept through the East, winning 17 out of 26 games. They were still sullen, mean, but they stayed in there. English found a bit of his magic and had two good weeks—and when he sulked it was Youngblood who carried them. They fought Packy and they fought their opponents. They

were tossed out of every ball park in the league. Packy braced himself against the storm and kept them in there—all the time balancing three big things in his mind.

The anger of the Bears—Packy's own toughness—and the end of the season. Packy held these things in his head, weighing them there as one juggles a handful of shot to determine how heavy it is. Packy watched the anger of the Bears reach the exploding point, and he judged his own iron will and looked for the last day of the season. He was trying to make them come out even. It was a delicate thing at best. He knew that, and the thought stayed with him day and night. He became tired, haggard, but he kept them in there. And the days rolled by and they were playing baseball again....

CHAPTER III

AUGUST HAD wandered away like a lost hobo, and it was early September now. The last scorching haze of summer lay over the city, silent, heavy and oppressive.

These were the days when tempers flared, when nerves stretched to the breaking point, when bodies faltered and faces were drawn with fatigue. These were the days when the sun and the combat ate the core out of a man's heart and beat him into the dust under the massive wheels of baseball's pennant race.

These were the dog days....

It was early afternoon, and Packy Donovan sat behind his desk deep under huge Bear Stadium. He sat quietly, making small squares with a pencil on a sheet of paper.

He heard the door open as a player entered the dressing room next to his office, but Packy didn't look up. There were other things on his mind.

The Bears and the Clippers—the Clippers and the Bears. For two gruelling months these two had fought it out down the slow backstretch of the race of the flag. The lead had changed hands, changed again, been tied—only to be broken

once more.

This had been a race to break players. The Bears were battered and weary. One by one the rest of the teams in the league had risen to challenge the leaders. They had been beaten back until only those two remained—the Bears and the Clippers.

And now—on the last day of the season—it had come to a point. A sharp, brightly-polished point. Everything rested on this game. They were all tied. This was the money game—for glory and one more flag for the Bears—if they made it.

Packy looked around the room and leaned back in his chair. His eyes were narrow and tired—weary with the fatigue that comes from too many sleepless nights, too many fights, from too many hot, wretched afternoons spent in a cauldron of hate.

The Bears had changed in the past two months. Packy could feel the change. Every day they had come closer to open rebellion. Fenton played beautiful baseball—every second day. But on the off-day Fenton was the same temperamental, sullen rebel who had given Harry Mills gray hair and an early grave.

English, Gantt and Youngblood and the unpredictable Willow Young—these were the men Packy needed today. And these were the wild men, the players no other team in baseball would touch with a ten-foot pole.

But Packy had kept them in there, and young Harman walked around with a tight grin on his face, and Packy knew he was assured of a future in the game—if he took this pennant.

The thing is, thought Packy, I don't know when they'll blow up in my face. It's close. Maybe too close. You can't stretch a thing this tight without breaking it. If we could have wrapped it up yesterday, or last week. But now it's today. One more day—and I can't tell if they'll go even one more day without exploding.

Packy heard the muffled rumble

of the crowd outside, and the slam of the door as the rest of the team came in. He stood up, ran a hand through his thinning hair. Then he put a tough grin on his face and walked through the door into the dressing room.

They were all there—in their street clothes. Gantt was lounging against a locker with a cigar in his mouth. Fenton was sitting quietly in a corner reading a newspaper. The rest of them were on the benches in front of their lockers, sitting there like men who were waiting for something to happen.

Instinct made sharp by weeks of tension struck a thin, quavering note of warning in Packy's chest, and he walked among them, stopped in front of English.

"We're late," he said. "Let's get moving."

English looked at Packy, then shrugged his shoulders.

Packy looked around. "Move!" he said sharply.

Over in the corner, Fenton rustled his newspaper softly. Gantt blew a cloud of smoke into the air and the smell of it hung there. Packy heard the clock on the wall ticking over the muted surf of stadium noise that eddied against the walls.

He looked at them—and then it hit him as he stood there.

Strike!

IT HAD blown up in his face—but not with the eruption of hate and anger he had expected. Packy looked at them and knew it had passed that point. These were the misfits—the rebels—the truly unmanageable ones. These were the ones everybody else had given up on.

Packy said, "I'll chase every one of you out of baseball. I'll break you and send you away and you'll never see the inside of a major league park again."

English grinned. "All of us, manager? The whole lot of us?"

"The whole lot," answered Packy coldly.

"That might be a little rough, manager," said English. "You can't fire this whole team. You can't sell

the whole bunch of us. We're the outcasts, manager. It's not us who'll never see a major league park again. It's you, manager. When the story breaks you'll be out of baseball forever."

Packy turned to the rest of them and said, "And what if I don't buck you?"

"You quit," snapped Youngblood suddenly from across the room. "Get out of this dressing room. Get out of baseball. Keep away from this team. Quit, manager—and then we'll play ball today."

Packy stood there, never feeling so small, with that faint note in his chest that was anger and a little bit of fright—and he knew what he must do, then. He was 42 years old and the magic was perhaps gone from his hands and legs—but he knew what he must do now.

"White!" Packy snapped.

The equipment manager came out of his room.

"Break out my uniform," Packy said.

The equipment man turned, and Packy said. "Not the one I've been wearing. Get my old uniform. The one I told you to save for me. Bring it to me like it is."

Packy heard them stir, then. Fenton gaped in surprise, then shrugged his shoulders. Willow Young looked at Packy strangely, then turned his back to the Bear manager.

The equipment man brought the uniform, and Packy sat down and started undressing. He shrugged into the suit, feeling the stiffness of the cloth that smelled of mothballs. There was a jagged tear under one arm where flying spikes had ripped the cloth.

When he finished, he stood up and put on his cap. He shrugged his shoulders and picked up his glove.

The equipment man was an old, grizzled fellow who had been with the Bears for years, and he said, "Where you goin', Packy?"

Packy's voice was quiet, almost gentle when he answered. "Why, Dan, I'm going to play baseball. You remember?"

He reached out, punched the old man's shoulder lightly with a big

fist. Then he looked around at the Bear players. "I'm going out there and beat the devil out of the Clippers. Anybody coming with me?"

There was an unbelievably long moment of silence, then Willow Young said, "Me. I'm going with you."

Packy tried to grin, and couldn't. Willow Young—the wild, unpredictable screwball Willow Young. Packy turned and walked to the door. He pushed it open. Behind him there was a sudden stir of movement. A locker door slammed.

Packy leaned momentarily against the wall, tried to swallow the hammering of his heart. They would be out now. He knew that. But it had been that close. And he wasn't kidding himself. They still hated the ground he walked on—and the whole lot of them, including Willow Young, were waiting to see him fail out there today.

Packy knew he had done a crazy, idiotic thing. He was still in shape, but he was 42 years old. Packy only hoped he could reach back and find just a little of the magic he had once had.

If he failed...he knew he would be out of baseball forever.

CHAPTER IV

PACKY walked alone across the diamond in Bear stadium, and 70,000 people watched him. Watched him at first in silence, then with a slow murmur of surprise as Packy talked to an umpire. Then the loudspeakers were blaring his name and position and the crowd rumbled, then exploded in applause.

Packy looked up once, and his eyes were bright. He knew they were applauding the memory of his career, but even that small thing was good to know.

The Clipper team stopped infield practice and openly gaped at him. Packy saw the stir in the press box high atop the stadium.

He shook hands with Traynor. The Clipper manager said, "The heat got you, Donovan?"

"You might say that," Packy answered.

They were silent then, two men who had fought viciously through the blistering days of a showdown race, but who respected each other as men of anger and courage.

Packy saw Willow Young come out of the Bear dugout then, stuffing his shirttail into his britches and grabbing a glove as he went by the bench. In a moment English came out, then the rest of the Bears were straggling onto the diamond.

"You through with the field?" asked Packy.

"Take it," said Traynor.

The Bears spread out across the diamond. Packy went out there with them, ignoring their questioning looks.

Swanson was hitting long fly balls into the field. Horner, the bull-pen coach, was drilling grounders to the infielders. Packy walked to the shortstop position, waved Ted Terry aside. "You take a rest now," Packy said. "We'll need you later."

Horner yelled, then swung on a ball. Packy went sideways in a smooth, sliding lunge and trapped the ball. He palmed it, rolled his stocky body sideways. He swung his long right arm and the ball went on a long line to first, cracking like a shot into Fenton's glove.

Packy played a few more, feeling the stiffness where once there had been fluidity, holding himself under control where once he had been able to go all out.

He judged himself brutally, without emotion, because there was no time for emotion now, and finally he was sweaty and hot and a little bushed. He walked towards the dug-out and the crowd gave him a hand. He wondered how they would feel if he failed in this crazy, fantastic scheme.

He called them in finally, and said, "Terry sits a while. Everybody else the same. Let's go."

They looked at him for a long moment—and there were things he could have said. But he knew it was too late for that now. There were no words left. He would have to do it with action now.

Slats Turkin led off the Clippers. Packy had chosen Willow Young,

and the wiry lefthander opened with the fast ball.

Turkin bent his long body into an arc, watched the ball brush the front of his uniform. The umpire scissored his right arm out and Slats bleated loudly, pounding the plate with his bat.

Packy grinned. Turkin had been halfway across the plate when the ball brushed him.

Turkin kept twisting and Willow fed him the hard stuff, trying to crowd him back from the plate. Packy watched the count go up to three and two, and when he saw Willow's face twist in anger he called time.

Packy walked to the mound. "He's trying to scare you, Will," he said.

Willow Young started to say something, then a strange look came over his face. "Give him the drop now," said Packy, "and act mad as hell before you throw it."

Moments later Turkin was throwing his bat away in disgust and Willow was grinning at the third strike the lanky Clipper had let go by.

It didn't last. Traynor had big guns, and he had them jammed into the top of his batting order. Young gave Clipper Hyman a piece of an outside curve and Hyman slashed it into the hole between short and second.

PACKY doubled over, legs twinking. He lunged, got one bare hand on the ball. He was completely off balance, and then he saw English coming over from behind second.

"Hi!" yelled Packy. He flipped the ball underhand to English. English reached for it, fumbled and lost control, then scrambled for it while Hyman crossed first safely.

Packy straightened. English grimaced, started to throw his glove away. Packy yelled, and English stopped, his mouth sullen and dangerous.

Packy went over to English. "How's Nora?" he asked. "She in the stands today?"

English stopped. He looked at Packy for a moment, and Packy saw the same look on English's face that

had been on Willow Young's face moments before. The Bear second baseman turned and walked back to position. Packy stood there, a little puzzled at the whole thing.

Things blew up then. The next Clipper batter turned almost around trying to get away from a high pitch and the ball hit the bat. The ball blooped gently and beautifully, like a tired dove into the hole behind second. English went back and Youngblood came in from center-field on a dead run. Youngblood yelled and English stopped. Suddenly Youngblood stopped, and the ball fell safe. The two players stood there, glaring at each other. Packy sprinted over, scooped up the ball and fired it to third to cut off Hyman.

Then he turned to the two Bear players. "You two been fighting all year like this, haven't you?"

"Go to hell," snapped Youngblood. "Go to hell yourself," grinned Packy. "English does the calling from now on and you play accordingly."

Packy turned to English. "Okay?" The second baseman kicked at the grass with his foot. "Okay with me."

Then English, always unpredictable, did a funny thing. He grinned a little. "Hell, Donovan. You always did run things out here when you played."

They broke up the huddle and went back to their positions, and Packy's mind was whirling. *That's right*, he thought. *I always did run these guys when I played. I used to keep all these guys in line when I played.*

Packy remembered the look on Willow Young's face, and the same look on English's face.

It hit Packy then. Slowly at first, then with a rush.

It had been him, Packy Donovan, who had held the Bears together!

Not Harry Mills, with his soft voice and his shy smile—but Packy, the veteran, the firehorse. And Willow Young had remembered that—or rather had realized it for the first time today—when Packy had called time and gone to the pitcher's box. Packy had done it countless times

when he was playing with the Bears. He thought of English, and how he worshipped his wife, and how he, Packy, had always reminded English that she was watching him play. It had calmed the hot-headed English countless times during tight spots.

CHAPTER V

PACKY DONOVAN was a very bewildered man for a few minutes. He looked around him, at his former teammates. It was hard to realize that Harry Mills had not been as great as they said. Even Packy himself believed he was that great. Packy knew now that he would have held the Bears together after Harry died—but Packy had retired from the game.

Packy looked at the plate, saw a Clipper batter up. Automatically, from the habit of many seasons in a playing uniform, he turned and yelled at Willow Young. "This is Miller, Will. He likes them high. Keep that ball low and inside."

Willow nodded and then Packy watched him retire the side without a hit to kill the inning.

Hugh Benson was on the mound for the Clippers, and the huge right-hander toiled mightily. The Bears couldn't touch him today, and the innings rolled by.

And Packy fell into the automatic habit acquired from many seasons of play. He moved the Bears around, cajoled them, laughed at them, prodded them and then soothed their rattled nerves. He talked continually to Willow Young, and the slender lefthander twirled faultlessly. The Bears, for the first time in two years, a smoothly-functioning unit, forgot their hate and anger and played baseball. They became the brilliant team of players who had been the scourge of the league.

The pressure finally ruffled Benson. Packy, up at bat, fouled off six straight balls and then drilled a scorching grounder into left field. He ran towards first, slower than he had once been. He made the swing, started towards second. Halfway to second Packy stopped as the Clipper left fielder picked up the ball.

Packy shook his head, turned back and trotted slowly back towards first. He clicked the numbers off in his mind, and when he reached four he wheeled and sprinted towards second base. Behind him the Clipper first baseman yelled as the ball came from left field to first.

Packy skidded into second base and grinned. He sobered quickly. The Bears needed insurance. Packy went after it.

He took a lead off second. Benson, frowning, looked at Packy, then faced the plate. When Benson raised his leg—Packy spurted.

There was a surprised shout. Packy saw the Clipper third baseman coming up to cover the bag. The third baseman had his foot on the bag, stretched for the throw, when Packy went into the air, laying his body like a heavy steel bar into the Clipper infielder.

The impact splattered bright lights behind Packy's eyeballs. Dimly, through the cloud of dust, he saw the ball clutched in the hand of the third baseman. Packy flicked out his free leg and with consummate skill and timing he kicked the ball out of the Clipper player's hand. The ball rolled out of the cloud of dust and Packy stood up on the bag, trying to keep his balance, grinning through the dirt on his face.

He felt like something had broken loose in his back, but he stood straight and taunted Benson in loud and profane language. The big pitcher grimaced, then rocked quickly into his next pitch. Packy streaked, then dug in and stopped.

The catcher threatened with his arm. Packy laughed at him. The catcher fired the ball to the third baseman and Packy went back to the base, belting solidly into the Clipper and upsetting the man. The ball rolled away and Packy started towards home again. The Clipper shortstop scrambled for the ball, and Packy went back to third, laughing.

THE STANDS were rumbling now. Packy picked up his cap, tossed it away. An umpire brought it back to him. Packy took it, waved it at Benson and shouted something unprintable.

The big pitcher started towards third, and suddenly the Bear dug-out boiled over as Packy's players came out of it on the run.

Packy laughed again. This was like old times. The Bears are a team again. They knew now who had made them go. And Packy sobered as he realized that even he had been fooled by the manner of Harry Mills. Packy had tried the fist—when all he had to do was take the team and play them as he did in the old days.

Poe was the batter and Benson stretched to pitch. Packy tipped his cap and Poe stiffened, then swung across the plate, holding the bat in both hands. Infielders scurried up to stop the squeeze play. Packy put his head down and sprinted.

Pot hit the ball delicately, pushing it down the third baseline. Packy stepped over it and kept running. Behind Packy a fielder scooped up the ball, fired it to the Clipper catcher.

Packy butted the catcher, raising his shoulders at the moment of impact like a fullback. The catcher staggered backwards, dropping the ball. Packy stepped on the plate, turned towards the dugout—and then fell flat on his face.

English was in the on-deck circle, and he ran to Packy. "I saw your wife in the stands," Packy told him. "She's got a pretty hat. Get a hit and I'll buy her two more just like it."

Then Packy Donovan dove deeply into blackness.

He was in the dugout when he came out of the black fog. English was sitting beside him. "Why aren't you batting?" asked Packy.

"I did," said English. "It was a home run. You owe me some hats."

Packy groaned, and straightened up. He looked at the scoreboard. The Bears had scored three runs while he was unconscious!

Men were on base now, and Fenton stood up in the on-deck circle, tossed away extra bats. Packy yelled and Fenton looked around. "This Benson is hurting," Packy said. "Hit the first pitch he throws."

Fenton nodded, went up and rapped a double, scoring two more Bear runs.

Benson had already taken his shower and Traynor had put his third pitcher in there before the Bears were retired. They had made nine big runs.

Packy stood up as the Bears started out of the dugout. "Now it's Terry," he said. "I was an old man when you guys were coming up. I'm going to rest a minute."

"Rest longer than that," said English. "We found out who made the team go today, Packy. I guess everybody was blind—including you. We both made mistakes. But you learned today—and we did, too."

English wasn't a sentimentalist. He stuck out his jaw, tilted his cap, and said, "Let's play baseball."

Packy watched them go, and he knew that the Bears were going to be all right. He knew they would be in there from now on, and when these players left, he would still be here, taking the wild ones, the rebels, the outlaws—and making champions out of them.

And most of all he knew there would be lots of pennants. Not for Harry Mills, or old Ben Harman—or for anyone else—but for Packy Donovan.

The thought made him happy, and he sat there, watching his Bears take the field.

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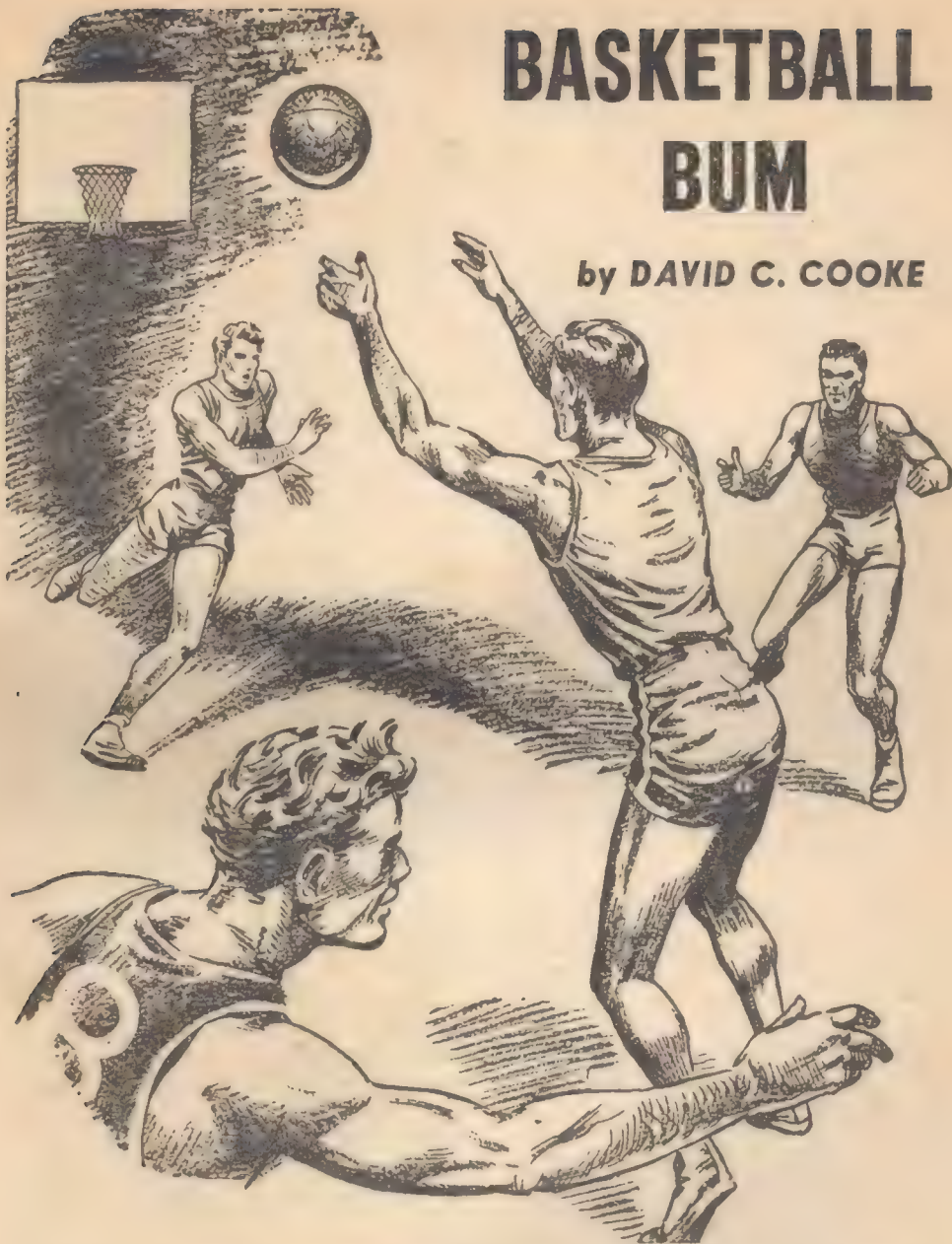
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BASKETBALL BUM

by DAVID C. COOKE



A hoop has been didn't clip the twines like that from mid-court. Nor touch the leather off the backboard into the basket that way with one hand

JIM BELL smiled grimly to himself as he climbed the stairs from the lockers in a red and white Trojan uniform. His stunt had worked again, the fifth time in as many basketball seasons, as he had

known it would. Just fifteen minutes earlier he had been down to his last thirty-seven cents, and now he was on the payroll as a full-fledged member of the quintet that until a month ago had been top team in the league.

It had been easy hooking up with the outfit. He had gone up to Shorty Williams, their rotund but tough coach, and said: "My name's Bell. Jim. I'm your new forward."

Williams, sweat-shirt over beefy shoulders, whistle around his thick neck on a nickeled chain, had looked him over, from his flaming carrot top to his size-ten bottoms, and had said:

"Beat it, bum. We ain't in the market."

But Jim stayed there. He peeled off his shoes and grabbed a ball. He went out on the maple and shot baskets from midcourt. He laced them in from the sides. He trickled them off the backboard with one-hand heaves. Every one had been a bull's-eye, right through the center.

And it had impressed the hard-bitten Williams, just as it had those other coaches. When Jim came off, grinning, Williams said: "Who'd you play for last, Bell? I like your style."

Jim rattled off names of clubs, and Williams nodded and jerked a thumb over his shoulder, saying: "Go jump into a uniform. Maybe I can find a spot for you."

But what Jim had failed to mention was that he never stayed more than a season with any one outfit. He was a basketball bum with itching feet and when the call to move on came over him he had to listen to it. His aimless wandering had cost him many a good setup with many a good team, but he had never been able to lick it.

The coach looked Jim over with a cynical eye as he came up on the floor. "Lot of beef you have to carry around," he observed. "Doesn't it slow you down?"

Jim gave him a wide grin. "Give me a chance and I'll show you."

Williams nodded. "Okay. Go in for Downing, with the seconds. Grab a white jersey over there." He pointed to a chair on which an odd assortment of uniforms had been dumped.

Time was called and Jim left the sidelines. He told the assembled players who he was and a freckle face youngster with shaggy blond hair and a scrawny frame beamed at him.

"My name's Mike Frohlich," he said. "I saw you two years ago, in Cleveland. You were a ball of fire."

Jim grunted, thankful that Frohlich had seen him at his best. "That was a long time ago; it'll take me a while to get back into condition."

The first string brought the ball in and started passing it around, looking for a hole. Jim covered his man easily, blanketing him at the sidelines. He played slowly, feeling it out to see how his legs would stand up after the layoff. But young Frohlich was all over the court, playing with wild abandon. He had energy and to spare; he snagged a pass and started downcourt in a fast dribble.

The red jerseys rallied and hemmed him in, and he rifled it to Jim with a neat backhand. Jim took it on the tips of his fingers, left his feet with a twisting motion, and pushed it at the hoop. The sphere whistled through the netting and he went backcourt. It gave him a feeling of exhilaration to know that he could still put them in so easily.

The first string brought it up again, passing cautiously. Ed Parish tried to charge through, then tossed to Stu Hyland. Hyland took his time and let it go. It was good.

Frohlich took the ball out and lobbed to a stringbean named Dick Gabriel. Gabriel danced up and passed back to Frohlich and the tow-head was away. They boxed him in at the bucket and it was a jump ball.

Mike Frohlich went up after the pill and deflected it to Jim, and he speared it through the basket without touching the backboard.

They scrimmaged another fifteen minutes and it was five minutes too long for Jim. He was breathing hard and feeling thoroughly bushed by the time Shorty Williams blew the whistle.

"Not bad, Bell, not bad at all," the coach said as they came out. "Stick around, and I'll try to use you against the Bears tomorrow."

Jim grinned, but he didn't feel happy inside. He had hoped for more time to get into condition, but it

seemed that they weren't going to give it to him.

"There's one other thing," Williams said as Jim started down to the lockers. "What do you think of the Trojans? As a team, I mean."

Jim turned, and he saw that Williams was dead serious. His brow was furrowed and there were little worry lines around his mouth.

"Seems like a good bunch," Jim said. "They should be able to hold their on in any circuit. Why?"

"Just wondering, that's all, just wondering." The coach forced a smile. "Hit the showers and rest up. I'll talk to you later."

MIKE FROHLICH waited for Jim and they left the arena together. As they walked slowly down the street Mike said, "Where you staying, Bell?"

Jim shrugged. "A park bench, I guess. I don't have the price of a room."

"There's an extra cot in my place." Mike offered. "You're welcome to it."

Jim said, "Thanks; I'll make it up to you when I get my first check."

"Just help the Trojans win," the towhead replied quietly, "and we'll call it square. The team's been in the cellar so long I don't know how we'll ever get out."

They came to a bar and Jim slowed up, suddenly remembering how long it had been since he'd had a glass of cool beer. He said: "Let's have a drink. It'll take the taste of the workout from our mouths."

The youngster looked at him and frowned. "If the coach hears about this he'll—"

"Look," Jim snapped. "No lecture, please. Lend me a five spot and give me your address. I'll be up later."

Mike reluctantly dug a bill from his wallet and handed it to Jim, and Jim went in and ordered a beer. But when it came he knew that he had been wrong; he'd put his foot on too many brass rails these past five years, and as of this moment he was going on the wagon. He was going to give himself a chance.

The following afternoon, as they filed from the lockers, Shorty Wil-

liams waved Jim aside. He looked closely at the redhead, eyes hard, and said, "I looked up your record, Bell, and it's not good."

This was a new switch on the routine and Jim was caught without a reply. It had always been he who had broken off, and he couldn't afford to get fired with his finances so low. He turned to go back into the lockers, feeling as if his personal world had collapsed.

"Hold on a minute," Williams stopped him. "All I said was that I looked up your record. But in my book action on the court means more than newspaper words. Want to give our outfit a chance?"

Jim grinned and started to thank him, but he was glad that he kept his mouth shut. The coach was a tough old codger, and besides, he wasn't finished.

He said: "By the way that beer you had last night is costing you ten bucks; I'll take it out of your check. Now get out there and let me see more of your defense techniques. White jersey again."

Jim was a turmoil of emotions as he trotted out to the court. Williams, he thought, was one of the squarest guys he'd met. Not many coaches would stick their necks out and take a chance on a player with a record. But he had another color for Mike Frohlich. It was clear that the towhead had shot his mouth off about the bar stop, and Jim didn't like people with loose lips.

Then they were scrimmaging. Slim Atkins, the string-bean center for the red jerseys, took the jump and tapped it back to Stu Hyland. The rangy guard rifled it down to Ed Parish, and the ball whistled through the hoop, a marker in less than four seconds.

Mike Frohlich took it out and lobbed to Gabriel, and Jim went downcourt, dancing for position. Mike took it again on a quick reverse, charged, and passed back to Gabriel. Stu Hyland clipped the guard and Williams blasted his whistle.

"Watch that stuff," he cautioned Hyland. "We're going to need every

point tonight, and the Bears will make those fouls count."

They clustered about the basket as Dick Gabriel toed the line. Williams back-handed the ball to him and stepped away. Gabriel bounced it twice and then shot. It tapped off the backboard and dropped in. He took it again, but even as the ball left the guard's hand Jim saw that it was not going to be good. He left his feet in a heave and pushed it back up, and it fell down through the netting.

When Williams blew the final whistle Jim wasn't quite as bushed as he'd been the previous day. His wind was coming back and it made him feel good. But he noticed that the fellows had not been feeding them to him, even when he was in the clear, and that he couldn't understand.

He got the answer when he reached the lockers. The rest of the squad was already there, and their eyes were cold. It seemed that Stu Hyland had been appointed spokesman for the team, for the others kept quiet when he walked up to Jim and said:

"Bell, we don't want you with the Trojans. Maybe you've been able to fool Shorty Williams, but we're not as dumb. If you know what's good for you you'll turn in your uniform and beat it."

Jim frowned. "What's the idea? Is it that much of a crime to step into a bar?"

"That doesn't have anything to do with it," Hyland said. "My dad used to work on the *Cleveland Chronicle*, in sports. Phil Hyland. Ever hear of him?"

Then Jim understood. Shorty Williams hadn't said anything to the fellows, but the remark Mike Frohlich had made about seeing him in action in Cleveland had started the ball rolling. Phil Hyland had taken more than a personal interest in the Cleveland Rams, and it was apparent that he considered Jim something of a rat for pulling out as he had, after only little more than half a season with the outfit.

"So what?" Jim said to Stu Hyland and the rest of the assembled Trojans. "I left the Rams because I

wanted to. And I'll leave this outfit when I want to—or when Williams gives me my walking papers. Until then you guys are just wasting your time, get it?"

Hyland nodded curtly. "We get it, Bell. Maybe you'll go on drawing your check every week and maybe you'll wear a Trojan uniform, but don't think that's enough to put you on the team. As far as we're concerned, you'll be somebody on the floor we never saw before. Do you get it?"

JIM WALKED around town the rest of the afternoon and early evening. He knew he should have his room. Mike Frohlich would be there, and Jim wanted to stay as far away from him and the rest of the team as he could.

And then it was game time, and Shorty Williams was talking to them in the lockers. His face was a determined mask and he spoke slowly, confidentially.

"Well, this is it," he said softly. "The third time against the Bears. Think we can take 'em this time?"

"Sure we can," Mike Frohlich said quickly. "They've beaten us twice, so what?" We're better now, and we know their style."

"Besides," Dick Gabriel added, "it'll mean a lot more for us to win now. We need this game to get back in the running."

Williams grinned widely. "That's the way I like to hear you talk. Let's get going and give them a hot time of it!" He added, "You wait, Bell."

When the squad had filed out Shorty Williams closed the door and leaned heavily against it. He was suddenly old and tired and no longer the tough coach. He walked slowly to the bench where Jim was sitting, sighed, and dropped wearily to it.

Jim didn't know what to expect. Was this just the "talk" Williams had said he was going to have with him, or was it something else? After that scene in the lockers he thought it was probably more logical to expect his first and final pay check from the Trojans and a verbal pink slip.

"So you think the team should be able to hold its own, do you?" Williams said abjectly. "In any league."

Jim sighed to himself. It was the "talk", after all. He said: "That's right. They've got speed, they've got class, and they know how to shoot."

The coach nodded. "Plenty of everything—except on the playing field. Individually they're great, but in action they're strictly second rate. That's the reason I took you on, Bell. You're a floater and I don't like floaters. But you're also a good, experienced player, and that I need badly."

Jim knew this would be a good time to keep his mouth shut. He leaned back against the lockers and listened.

"It's worse than I told the boys," Williams said. "A devil of a lot worse." He exhaled sharply and looked at the tips of his fingers, and Jim saw that they were trembling.

"This afternoon," the coach went on, "I got called on the carpet by the men who control the team. They said that we've been losing too many games and too much money. They said that we've become a bad business proposition. They said...they said that unless we snap out of it the team is through."

He turned cool, steady eyes on Jim, searchingly. "I'm depending on your basketball know-how to give them the spark they need to push them over the hump, Bell. Think you can do it?"

If it hadn't been so tragic it would have been funny, and Jim didn't know how to answer. The squad had tried to push him out—had virtually black-balled him—and here he was being asked to try to save them!

After a moment he said quietly: "I don't know, Shorty. I can't promise any miracles and I don't even know how to start, but I'll try."

The coach blew out a lungful of air, the tension gone. "That's enough for me, fella. Let's get out there now."

Jim stayed on the bench during the first scramble, watching the boys carefully. And he saw what Williams meant. In the opening plays they were balls of fire, playing brilliant-

ly and romping up and down the court without much trouble. The Bears were a cage-wise team and pulled every trick trying to stop them, but still they forged ahead. Ed Parish and Blackie Hynd tallied two baskets each in the first few minutes, and Stu Hyland accounted for still another. But they were playing without finesse or reliance on their teammates. They scored through their own exuberance and not because of spectacular or even professional ball handling.

AS THE minutes rolled around the clock the Bears started to tighten up. They played a strong-arm, dazzling game when they got possession of the ball, and the Trojans could not keep up with their passing. Mike Frohlich, who had gone in for Ed Parish, managed to snag a couple, but aside from that the defense was miserable. The Bears started climbing on the scoreboard, and it seemed that the more they closed the score the worse the Trojans became.

Shorty Williams was sweating and it wasn't from the heat of the arena. "If they'd only play like they do in practice!" he muttered. "This is murder!"

Jim was burning with excitement. "Let me go in," he suggested. "Maybe I can sink enough to keep us ahead."

The coach looked at him again with that searching light in his eyes. Then he nodded. "Make it for Ed Parish."

Jim trotted out to the floor after the next Bear ringer and the squad greeted him with tight lips and cold eyes. But he ignored the treatment and told Stu Hyland to call time. They got down on the maple and a kid came in with towels.

"Look," Jim said. "You guys don't like me. Okay, we'll let that ride. But you do like the Trojans, and you're gonna drop this game sure as blazes unless you start slinging it around. Pass them crazy and it'll be a sure-fire walkaway."

"Yeah, sure," Blackie Hynd grunted. "Them over us. What did the coach have to send you in for, any-

way?"

"Who the devil are you to hand out orders, Bell?" Stu Hyland said sarcastically. "Go back and warm your tail on the bench if you don't like the way things are shaping up."

Jim shrugged, not knowing what else to say. He was trying to give it to them straight but they wouldn't listen to him. He felt that he was letting Shorty Williams down, but he had warned the coach not to expect any miracles, that all he could do was his best.

And he did his best when play was resumed. He swore to himself and raced around the court like a madman. He was every place at once, snagging passes, blocking sure points, upsetting plays. He went high into the air and plucked one off the rim of the basket, rifling it to Mike Frohlich before he hit the floor again.

Frohlich was away like a streak, bolting downcourt, and Jim yelled: "Pass it, Mike! Pass!"

But the speedy towhead was deaf. He went square into the husky bear guards and it was a jump ball. Jim saved the play by taking the tap, twisting, and arching it into the net. It was spectacular basketball and brought the first rise from the fans, but it wasn't enough to take the period. At the horn the Trojans were trailing 34 to 36.

Shorty Williams was somber and drawn as he faced them in the lockers. He had very little to say and what he did say was in a whisper, as if he was afraid he'd yell if he raised his voice.

But Stu Hyland had plenty to say. "Coach," he began, "There's not a guy here who wouldn't run his legs off and play his heart out for the squad." He stared squarely at Jim, and amended: "Not a *regular* member of the outfit, that is. We'll do everything you tell us as well as we can. Except one thing. None of us want to play with this Bell guy."

Williams raised his eyebrows quizzically. "What's the matter with Bell?"

"He's no good for the team," Hyland said. "He'll stay for a while and then move on when he gets tired of

us. Believe me, I know all about him."

Jim sat back and took it. He couldn't deny anything that had been said, and he knew he'd just make a fool of himself if he tried to put up a fight.

But Williams did not see it the same way. He said: "I know all about him too. Every team he's been with and how long he's stayed with them."

"And you're still going to keep him?" Hyland said incredulously.

"That's right, I'm still going to keep him." The color had started to rise in the coach's face and he was speaking in a clipped voice. "Any objections?"

A LOOK of amazement flashed across Hyland's face. "But I don't understand," he stammered. "Why?"

"Maybe it's because I don't give a damn about the team," Williams snapped, "and maybe it's because I care one hell of a lot about what happens to it. Take your pick. But if you're not playing with Bell you're not playing at all. Is that clear?"

"Plenty clear," Hyland said heatedly. "Maybe that explains why we've been losing so many games lately. How many others are in on this plan to wreck the team, Williams?"

The coach's face was a livid beet-red now but he tried to control himself and said quietly, "Finished, Hyland?"

"Not yet, I'm not," the big guard retorted. "I'm going to report this to the front office and see what they have to say about it. We'll have another coach here damn quick!" He started peeling off his uniform. "Anybody else going with me?"

Ed Parish, Blackie Hynd, and Slim Atkins got up from the bench and followed Hyland to the other end of the lockers, and Shorty Williams looked over the remainder of the squad with cold appraising eyes and said: "Now that we're rid of the chaff maybe we can make a real team out of this outfit. Or do some of you fellows still think I've been giving you a bum deal?"

Jim said in a low voice "You can't let them go like that, Shorty. It's your whole team—and for what?"

"For a principle, that's what," Williams said. "All right, now we'll get down to serious work. And I don't mind telling you it's going to be tough sledding out there. The Bears are rugged characters, but if you'll let me beat some sense into your heads maybe we can still keep from being swamped."

He talked rapidly for the remainder of the half-time, telling them what he wanted down and how he wanted it done, and then they had to rush up the stairs for the final period.

When they reached the floor Jim said, "You know we don't have a chance, Shorty, with those guys out of the game. It'll be a slaughter."

"I know," Williams said, "but this is one time when I don't care. I'd rather have a bunch of second strings playing basketball the way it should be played than a squad of hotshots who won't learn for sour lemons. Just do the best you can out there and I'll be satisfied. Those Bears will know they've been in a fight anyway."

Hal Adams was at center, but he wasn't tall enough to take the face-off from the beanpole Bear tap-man. He was greased lightning on the court, though, and stole a pass before the Bears were able to make their advantage good. He rifled it to Bill Downing, and the shifty forward who had gone in as a guard, let it go to Frohlich on the sidelines.

Frohlich was away, bolting down-court, and passed to Jim with a skidding bounce. Jim took it up and dropped it in before the surprised Bears were able to stop him.

The score was tied up for the moment, but the Bears soon caught on to the new playing style and altered their defense. It was then that the difference in experience began to show.

Jim ran himself ragged up and down the court, his heart pounding harder, his breath coming faster with each passing minute. The pace was

too hectic for him, out of condition as he was, but he steeled himself and kept at it.

The fans in the gallery were now getting in the spirit of the game and started yelling encouragement to the Trojans. They were for the underdogs now, seeing the kind of fight they were putting up.

Jim called time after about eight minutes, and when the squad collapsed to the floor he said, "Well, what do you think? They're four up on us now, and we've still got a long road to travel."

"We'll keep after them," Bill Downing panted. "Those Bears aren't so tough, and we'll wear them out if we hold this pace."

Jim laughed in spite of himself. He had never heard such optimism, but he liked the way it sounded.

And then Mike Frohlich was talking. He said quietly: "I guess I owe you an apology, Jim. I was riding with Hyland when he told us the story. Especially after seeing you go in that—"

"But you didn't wait long enough," Jim explained. "You see, I didn't have a drink. I went on the wagon instead. Okay, let's get going!"

THEY STARTED playing again, and it seemed to Jim that the clock on the wall was standing still. The minutes dragged on endlessly, without a letup, and his legs were rapidly turning to rubber. He took a Bear guard before he could shoot. He sighed with relief when the referee blew his whistle and called the penalty.

They grouped around the bucket and Jim took the ball. He looked up at the hoop and it seemed to be wavering. He shook his head violently and blinked his eyes. His reserve was just about gone and he knew he couldn't last much longer.

He took his time getting set, hoping that the basket would stand still. But it didn't and time was running out. He shot once and missed, the first time he'd ever flubbed such an easy one. He took the ball again and bounced it. He held his breath as he

flexed his tired arms and let it go. But he could see that it was too short. An orange and black Bear pulled it down, but before he could pass, Mike Gabriel was on him and it was a jump ball.

Jim stood back, knowing that he couldn't take any more fast action. The ball went up and Gabriel tapped it to Frohlich. The towhead flashed away in a fast dribble and made it good with a long oblique shot that brought a gasp from the stands.

The clock said there were six more minutes to go, and Jim knew he'd never make it. He turned anxious eyes to the bench, but Shorty Williams shook his head. There was no one else to send in; Jim would just have to weather it out somehow.

"I'm—dead—on my—feet," he gasped to Mike Frohlich after the next Bear basket. "Can't last—much—longer."

"You gotta last, Jim! Frohlich said anxiously. "They're only three points up, and we need you!"

Jim shook his head numbly. "Can't."

There was no more time to talk. Gabriel rifled the ball in and Hal Adams rushed it down the sidelines. He shot to Downing, and after an exchange with Frohlich, Jim saw it coming down toward him.

He turned toward the basket somehow, though the backboard was only a white blur, and let it go. Then a Bear defense man bowled into him and sent him spinning.

Jim's body was a throbbing wreck of pain. He felt the urge to stretch out on the cool maple and go to sleep, but he still had his fighting spirit, and struggled awkwardly to his hands and knees.

And then a pair of strong arms

suddenly went around him and pulled him to his feet. He couldn't see who it was, but he could feel that the arms were cool and not covered with sweat. He felt himself being half-carried across the floor... There was a shouting from the fans—his name... And then he was sitting on a bench, his back propped up against the wall.

He opened his eyes and shook his head again. Stu Hyland's face swam before him. Only something was wrong. Hyland was smiling, and he was in uniform.

And then Hyland was talking. He said: "Sorry we acted like damn fools, Jim. We came back to the arena again. For laughs, and to see you guys get licked. But we found out that you and Shorty Williams were right. Anybody with so much guts must be okay. So we came back—to take over from here and wrap this game up. For you, Jim. And for the Trojans."

Jim forced a grin and raised a hand. "Good luck, guy," he said, and his mouth felt as if it were filled with marbles. Then something pressed his hand and Stu Hyland's face abruptly disappeared, to be followed by the sound of a whistle and running feet.

A cool towel was wiped across Jim's face, and then he heard Shorty Williams' excited voice. "You did it. Bell. You turned those bums into real hoopsters. A miracle!"

Jim leaned his head back and closed his eyes. He was completely fagged out but he'd never felt so good. Yes, he told himself, the Trojans were pretty good. They should be able to hold their own in any league. He thought he'd maybe stick around for a while and ride with them...

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HOT ROD HELL

by REYNOLDS
PHILLIPS

ROCKY GARRISON came to the Boulevard Speedway driving a battered Chevy coupe and towing a gaudy red-and-white roadster that had obviously seen better days. He came with a chip on his shoulder and the sure knowledge that someone would try to knock it off.

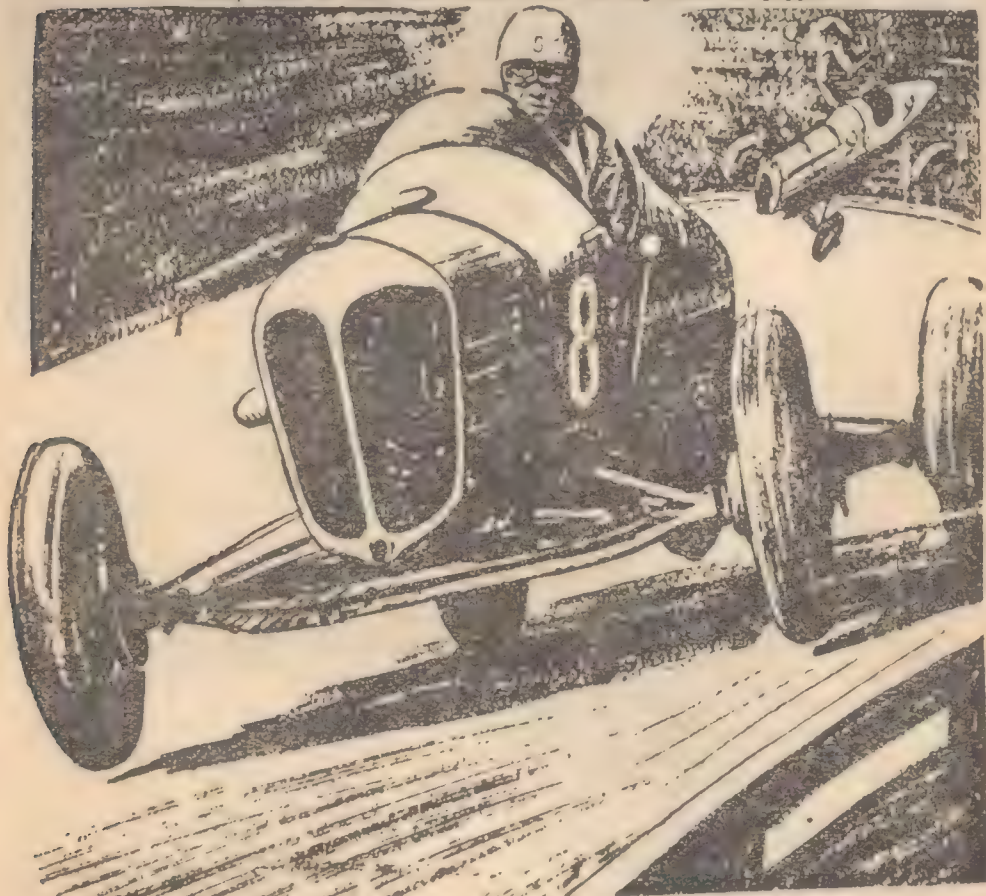
He wheeled up in front of the pits half an hour before the evening's time trials began. He climbed out of

the coupe and stood there, hands on his hips, listening to the Burl Ives record that blared over the public address system, looking up at the overhead banner that said, *HOT ROD RACING TONIGHT*. He was small and his cheeks were gaunt with the kind of paleness men ac-

**ROARING NOVELET OF MAY-
HEM ON THE MACADAM!**

Auto racing wasn't in Rocky's blood, anything but — yet when a fellow felt one of these neat little hot irons rear into action under his hand, he had to admit it did send a kind of thrill up his spine . . .

Rocky raced on down the stretch, sweat crawling under his goggles!



quire behind bars and locked cell doors.

Pete Harlin saw him first. Harlin stood looking him up and down, as though he were a tramp who had just wandered in off the railroad tracks.

Harlin was big and broad, his mouth a harsh gash that opened only to emit loud and uncouth noises. He opened it now and said, "So Abe Berliner finally got you out. What good's he figure a jailbird's goin' to do him around here?"

Rocky stared at the guy, letting his lip curl. "Maybe Abe figures the way I do. That I don't have to do any good for anyone but myself. I'm out now. I'm paid up, see? From now on I'm looking out for number one boy and no one else."

"What d' you mean by that?"

"You ought to know what I mean."

Rocky moved a step closer, so that he stood almost on Harlin's toes, glaring up at him. "I took the rap for you on that thing, Harlin."

Harlin's eyes seemed to retreat into his wide face. "What do you mean, Garrison?"

"You should ask *me*," Rocky said harshly. "You could see that farmer's car ahead of me. But you kept on crowdin' me. You didn't give me a chance to swing around him. I should've told the judge about that." He shook his head sharply. "But no, I got to be a gentleman. A sucker!"

Harlin's big hands fretted at his sides. "If you weren't so little, Garrison—"

"I'm big enough," Rocky said. He would have said more, but he saw half a dozen other hot rod jockeys coming toward him.

They greeted him with reserve, appearing a little embarrassed at his presence. He had never been exactly one of them in those wild days when they raced their junkers over back-country roads. He had been a mechanic, with magic in his fingers and a love of motors in his heart. The business of wheeling a hot rod at ninety miles an hour was not in his blood, and he had taken a whirl at it that one night only to try out the new manifold, his own design.

That's water over the dam now, he told himself. But he wouldn't forget. You didn't forget things like stark terror riding the night, the awesome noise of a crash. Or the smashed ribs and the pain and the little scars that gleamed back at you when you stared at your face in a mirror.

Harlin said, "Boys, Rocky come back to show us how to drive a hot rod. He must of took drivin' lessons in jail."

Denny Kodd, a kid with freckles, said, "Lay off him, Harlin. He's had it tough enough."

Rocky knew he should be appreciative, but six months behind the county's bars had taken that sort of thing out of him. He said harshly, "I'm old enough to take care of myself, Kodd. I'm old enough to take care of Harlin, too, any time he wants it."

For a moment tension hung in the air like fumes from an exhaust. Then Harlin laughed. "We'll see who takes care of who out there on that track tonight."

IT SEEMED to be a signal for the group to break up, and the drivers returned to their various cars. Rocky lifted the hood on his red-and-white roadster, his small form still shaking with anger. His mill didn't look like much. He hadn't had time to paint it up since getting out of the clink. But he'd had time to take care of things under the hood. He laid a hand tenderly on the block and it seemed to drain some of the anger from him.

He became aware of someone standing beside him and he straightened. It was Abe Berliner, who operated the track, a dumpy little guy with a white cap set methodically atop the white hair that bristled around his ears.

Berliner smiled the curious little smile of his. He said, "So it's nice to see you, Rocky boy. It was a dirty thing, stuffing you in that clink house."

Rocky shrugged. "Forget it. Thanks for talkin' the county into cuttin' down my time to six months, Abe."

But he thought, *Damn it, don't get the idea I think I owe you anything. I don't owe anybody. Not after sweating out six months like a criminal.*

"So it was still a dirty thing," old Abe insisted. "You turn over your car to keep from running into that farmer's jalopy. So you maybe save some people's lives. So you get tossed in the clinkhouse."

"Cut it," Rocky snapped.

He didn't want to hear any more about it. Sure, he'd been the goat all right. The public, whipped up by a newspaper called the Blade, had demanded the scalps of all the wild-eyed kids, the hot rod bunch who raced their junkers down the back roads at night. The only scalp they'd gotten was Rocky Garrison's.

Old Abe Berliner, who owned a small garage, had come to the kids' defense. He told the county authorities, "These boys here, they're tomorrow's mechanical geniuses. So they build these cars. So they got to have some place to run them. All right, so you go easy on them and I'll give them a place."

And old Abe had sold his garage and with the proceeds had leased this unused speedway. He'd taken the hot rod gang off the public roads and put them in business, gambling with every nickel he had in the sock.

Rocky thought about that. He said, "How's business, Abe?"

Abe lifted his hands, palms up. "Not good, Rocky boy. This *Blade*, it's after my neck. So it says I can't keep you boys off the highways. I'm only whetting your appetite for more speed, it says."

Rocky tinkered with a spark plug. "You got a lot of faith in a bunch of kids."

"They're good boys," Abe said. He paused, frowning. "But this Harlin now— About him, I don't know. The rest pay too much attention to what he says, just because he's loud in the mouth."

"Or maybe because he's won all three of your races so far," Rocky said.

Abe nodded easily. "So maybe you're the man to beat him. You got

the makings of a good race driver, Rocky boy."

Rocky felt his throat tighten. He said, "Look, let's get one thing straight, Abe. I'm no race driver. I'm a businessman, I hope. I'm out here for just one reason—to demonstrate this new manifold of mine. If I can sell it, I'll turn enough dough to set myself up in the garage business. That's permanent. That's the only thing I want, Abe."

Abe patted him on the shoulder. "So I hope you make it, boy." But there was an indefinite sadness in Abe's voice, and he turned and went away. Presently his voice came again, this time over the announcer's mike. Time trials started.

ROCKY CLIMBED in the bucket seat of his low-slung roadster and got a push from one of the trucks. The motor caught quickly, full-throated in its power. It sent a little thrill trickling down his spine. All right, so he was no speed demon. But he had a racing roadster that could challenge anything on the track, including Harlin. Except that he didn't intend to challenge anybody.

He glanced up at the stands. Somewhere up there, he hoped, sat a guy named Yenawine. This Yenawine was a representative of Riach Motor Supply, a big outfit with sales outlets across the nation. That was one thing Rocky had accomplished while sitting in his cell. He'd whipped up Riach's interest in his new manifold, a new and different thing. Riach had built one according to Rocky's specifications and had shipped it out to Rocky. This Yenawine was supposed to have arrived in time for tonight's races, to see how the manifold made out in action.

He did his time lap in 17.10. Not too fast, but good enough. But then, on the time trials there were no other cars on the quarter-mile macadam track. No memories of a horror-filled night and a farmer's jalopy dead ahead and another hot rod crowding up beside him. A hot rod driven by Pete Harlin, who could

look at death and laugh—as long as the death was going to befall someone else.

Two hours later, ten laps along on the forty-lap main event, Rocky had occasion to remember.

He knew he was a shade too high going into the turn. He knew the car behind him might be able to slip by on the inside. But he still did not know who drove the car behind him.

From the corner of his eye, he saw it. The nose of a green mill poking between his deck and the infield rail. Pete Harlin's No. 73, slamming in there, crowding him, like the ghost of that night on the back-country road.

Somehow a giant hand seemed to take hold of Rocky's spine, clamping it rigid to the bucket seat. Oil sweat oozed around his goggles, crawled on the palms of his hands around the corded wheel. If it had been anyone but Harlin...

He trod on the throttle, but the green mill remained there. He heard the sharp *click!* as hub caps met. And he did the only thing he knew to do.

He pulled higher on the turn, giving Harlin room. After all, he told himself, he couldn't risk a crackup. Not now. Not with that new manifold still to be proved. That was the important thing, the thing on which his future hinged. That was the only reason he had even come near a hot rod track.

Harlin was alongside him now but Harlin did not seem satisfied with that. Harlin kept pushing. Driving him higher and higher, toward the fence. Rocky saw the white of Harlin's teeth with the lips pulled back, and he cursed the guy and gave more ground. He was still too new at this business, still a mechanic and not a hot rod jockey.

Abruptly, Harlin drifted away from him and into the straightaway, into the lead. Rocky tried to wheel down out of the turn. He was careening wildly, with the fence dancing close above him. He felt her start to slide.

He tried to fight his way through,

battling the wheel, wrestling the roadster with all the strength of his inadequate shoulders. But it was no good. She spun, rubber shrieking, a beautiful gilhooley that brought her to a stop broadside on the track.

He sat there cursing. A little guy, half lost in the cockpit of the red-and-white roadster. A little guy, older than his twenty years, hard as rocks—on the track or off. Sitting there with the tears boiling up behind his goggles.

HHE WANTED to make a race of it so bad it was a crying thing inside him. Not to win; he wasn't good enough for that, and he didn't care about it anyhow. But to finish up there in the money. To show Yenawine, the Riach Motor Supply man, a skeptical guy waiting to be convinced that this new manifold of Rocky's was better than anything on the national market. And to show Harlin and the rest of the boys.

Four cars came roaring past, swerving, some of them, to avoid hitting him. Exhaust smoke billowed, blue beneath the arc lights. He heard the screaming of the bleacher bugs along the turn.

But he had not lost his motor, and the pitch of the bank got him rolling. He picked his spot now and gunned her out of it, flashing between two rocketing roadsters, wheeling her straight with the track.

Thirty laps left now, and half the cars were ahead of him. Up at the north turn, he could see Harlin's 73 hurtling down off the rim, passing another iron, whining toward top money again tonight. Harlin had been in the last row at the green flat because he had won the fast heat tonight, and in the inverted start the slowest cars of the evening started in the lead. Rocky had been in pole position in the second row, just two mills ahead of him.

He surged past one iron in front of the grandstand, another in the back-stretch. It had the singing power of a wild thing, this scarred No. 22 roadster of his. He could feel it in the drumbeat of rubber, feel it

surging through the centered steering wheel and up his arms. And he held it at bay, that tremendous power, fighting it through the turns, throwing his shoulders against the slewing skids. He didn't dare turn it loose. It was too much for him to handle, with his limited racing experience.

It was a mongrel, Rocky's 22, a mixture of this and that and many other things. A '41 Merc engine, with pickup to jump a traffic light. A cut-down body from a 1927 Model T, a relic of quieter days. He'd put it together in the brief time he'd been out of jail. He'd made it into a racing roadster, a hot rod. A small chunk of hell on wheels.

At the south turn he glimpsed the small clearing inside the blue racer ahead. A slot he might get through. Sweat stood on his forehead, and inside him a tense little knot expanded and crawled along his nerves, setting his arms rigid. He didn't have the confidence, the racing know-how to try it, when the tiniest wrong move could turn a race into flaming disaster.

Coming out of the turn now, onto the grandstand stretch. He caught the blue job there and edged past it. Everything faded but the high-pitched whine of motors, the reek of fumes, the track tilting wildly beneath him as he hit the turns.

He caught other mills and passed them. Always on the stretch, pouring it on, turning it loose. Then cautiously lifting his foot for the turns, unsure of himself.

He wondered what a wild man like Harlin could do with this red-and-white job of his. He knew he had something beneath the ragged skin of his car. He had that extra bit of soup he had engineered with his own hands—shaving down the head to raise engine compression, adding hot-shot spark, extra carburetor, those hundred other tiny but important things that took an ordinary automobile and transformed it into a mad-wheeling demon. He had it—if he could only drive it.

He rode out the forty laps and finished with four cars ahead of him.

Riding behind the money guys, riding in the smoke that spewed from their blowers. Making two futile passes at fourth place on the last lap and failing.

Back at the pits, he swung his short legs out of the bucket, sighing a bit, wondering what Yenewine would think of his car's performance. Where was Yenawine anyway? The guy's absence troubled him. He tinkered a bit with the motor while the crowd cleared away.

DOWN THE line, Pete Harlin had himself an audience. Rocky could see him leaning carelessly against a radiator, shooting off his mouth. About eight other drivers listened. Youngsters, all of them, hanging on Harlin's every word as though he were Henry Ford or somebody.

"The race track business is for monkeys in a cage," Harlin was saying loudly. "We build us a hot rod an' they confine us to drivin' it in a two-for-a-nickel track once a week. The heck with it."

Rocky felt the anger building inside him. He barked, loudly enough. "You should kick, Harlin! You won top dough again tonight. How much would you win beatin' up and down a country road?"

Harlin's laugh was short, explosive, like a backfire. He grinned at the others. "Pipe this guy Garrison. Only time he ever tries wheelin' a hot job on a road, he winds up in a ditch. No wonder he don't like road racin'."

A skinny kid with big eyes, a kid named Caster, said seriously, "Pete's got something, Rocky. This is supposed to be a free country. What right have they got ruling us off the roads?"

And someone else said, "They act like we're a bunch of babies and they got to give us candy to keep us quiet."

"Ever stop to think maybe Abe Berliner did us a good turn?" a mild voice asked. It was Kodd, the freckled kid. "Abe pulled us out of a mess of trouble and made it possible for us to keep drivin' these

things."

Another driver said, "I suppose we should give the guy a medal or something, Kodd. You get to be as good at this business as Harlin, you might be worth listening to."

Rocky wanted to scream at them. Abe Berliner had a right to be worried about Harlin's influence with the kids. Funny how they'd pick out one guy and set him up for an idol, especially a loud-mouth like Harlin. Then Rocky thought, *The devil with it. I got burned once trying to pull someone else's marshmallows out of the fire.*

And he turned back to fussing with his motor. He was still fussing when Harlin came up and stood peering over his shoulder.

Harlin said, "You chickened out on me on that turn, Garrison."

Rocky straightened, drawing himself up to his full five-feet-six. He said, "Like you chickened out when the cops arrived the night I piled up? But no, you'd never admit you were within a mile of the wreck, would you?"

Harlin's face went beef red. "Why, you little—I'll—"

"You'll what?" Rocky said, his voice curiously mild. "I'm as tough as you are, Harlin. You're not behind any steering wheel now."

For a moment he was sure Harlin was going to slug him. Then, out of nowhere, someone shoved between them. A dumpy guy in a white cap, disdaining any punches that might fly. Abe Berliner, standing there grunting, pushing Rocky away.

"So you guys want to fight it out, fight it out with automobiles," said Abe. "I got troubles enough."

H E HAD the troubles all right. He had a large fat man following him, smiling contentedly at the furor. Rocky recognized him as Douglass Wold, a reporter for the *Blade* who had covered the court trial that had sent Rocky behind the bars for reckless driving. Douglass Wold was not a sports writer; he did not know a carburetor from a water bucket on the fifty-yard line. Doug-

lass Wold was the man the *Blade* assigned to ride its various editorial hobby horses, and he rode them with long spurs and great delight.

Wold said smugly, "No sooner does Garrison get out of the clink than he's causing trouble again. A typical hot-rodder."

Rocky said, "Get out of my sight. Go find yourself a scoop, Wold."

"Please, Rocky boy," said Abe. His white cap was askew and he looked ready to cry. "Don't make things any worse for old Abe."

Rocky said, "Nuts. I'm interested in how things are for me. I learned that the hard way."

He turned around and stalked off, too angry to be sorry at this moment for what he had said to Abe.

He walked into the lobby of the cheap hotel where he lived, and a man unfolded from a chair and walked toward him. The man was tall, like a tom collins glass, but not nearly so fragile.

The man said, "Garrison?"

Rocky nodded and the other pushed out a hand. "I'm Yenawine. My train was late. I missed the races."

Rocky stared at him. "You mean I wasted my time tonight? I got to go out and do it again next week?"

"Why not? How else you expect to convince me this manifold will do what you claim it will?"

Rocky said, "Pal, I know what it'll do. I put those headers in the right spot to take off all the back-pressure, cut down an engine's heat. That way your power all goes into drivin' the wheels. You don't get any throb at all. All you got to do is listen to it—"

"I got to see it. In action. In a race." Yenawine said. "I'll see you next Friday, kid."

Rocky had a part-time job in a garage, obtained through the good offices of Abe Berliner, and in the morning someone laid a copy of the *Blade* beside his lunch bucket on a work bench. He saw the big, bold by-line of Douglass Wold. He could not resist reading what was printed beneath it:

"The hot rod assassins rolled again last night at the Boulevard Speedway, where one Abe Berliner conducts classes in four-wheeled mayhem. Miraculously, no one was killed.

"It is interesting to note, however, that there were rumors of talk among these speed-maddened young men—talk that they will once again take their murderous jalopies onto the public roads. If they do this, it will be because Abe Berliner has sharpened their appetite for speed.

"And if they do, the Blade promises it will see Berliner put out of business. It can promise because it, in turn, has the promise of the county commissioners on this score. If he lets these young monsters escape from their cage at Boulevard Speedway, things will be rough indeed for Brother Berliner!"

It was vicious, brutal stuff, including the account of his own brush with Harlin. Rocky did not finish reading the story. He crumpled the paper and threw it away. He let his temper boil but he did not let it alter the cold logic that past experience had given him. It did not matter what befell the United Nations, the Hottentots in Africa, or Abe Berliner. All that mattered was proving to a man named Yenawine that a Garrison manifold would do things for a powerful motor, that it would be to Riach Motor's Supply's decided advantage to manufacture the manifold and market it nationally, paying royalties to Rocky.

Wednesday was the night the hot-rodders brought their cars out to the speedway to try out adjustments they had made since the last racing night. Rocky arrived to find the track almost deserted. There were only four or five roadsters, a handful of pit monkeys.

He saw Kodd coming out of the pitside phone booth, moving like a calamity on its way to happen. He said, "What goes, boy?"

Kodd swung around, angry red drowning out the freckles on his face. "Those damn' fools! Of all the stupid things—they'd tear out their

axles to spite their rear tires!"

"What the devil you talkin' about?"

Kodd waved a frantic hand. "A bunch of the guys are out wheelin' on the road tonight. They let Harlin talk them into it."

ROCKY NODDED slowly. It was no surprise. He remembered the way they'd backed up Harlin's words, and then he remembered Wold's words in the *Blade*. If the youngsters got caught, it would mean the end of everything for old Abe Berliner, who had risked all he owned just to do the kids a good turn. And the kids would get caught, sure as anything.

He said, "Well, that's tough. But there's nothing we can do about it."

"Isn't there?" Kodd demanded. "I'm goin' out there an' try to talk some sense into them. If I can get there in time." He paused, studying Rocky. "Want to come along?"

Rocky stared. "I should stick my neck out again to save Harlin's?"

"Forget it," snapped Kodd, and headed for his road car, an ancient coupe.

Rocky didn't know quite why he did it. But when Kodd brought the coupe back past the pits, toward the gate, Rocky grabbed the door handle and swung aboard. Kodd stared at him curiously.

"I'm just coming for the ride," Rocky said. "Or maybe to pick up your pieces if you try gettin' tough with Harlin."

It was quite a ride. They took to the dirt roads at eighty miles an hour, slewing around the corners on not more than two wheels.

It was just dusk when Kodd finally stepped on the brakes. A long-deserted filling station stood there on a country corner, with some eight roadsters lined up around it. In the past it had served often as a clandestine meeting place for the hot rod boys, the starting point for their mad dashes down the roads.

The drivers were just getting into their roadsters. Kodd bounced among them like a wind squall and came face to face with Harlin.

Harlin said, "You had to stick your nose in, didn't you?"

Kodd said, "I had to try to keep you fools from ending up in the hoosegow."

Harlin laughed at him, a noise that revolted Rocky like the sound of a busted bearing. Harlin said, "There's no cops out here in the sticks."

Kodd looked around at the others. "You guys, you dopes! Don't you know you're playin' with trouble?"

"It's no skin off your foot," someone said.

Kodd said, "It's skin off Abe Berliner. You want to see the guy busted?"

Harlin stared at him a moment, then proceeded to ignore him. He turned to a guy who sat in an old pickup, its motor idling. "Joe, start pushin' these things."

Kodd grabbed Harlin by the front of his jumper, whirled him around. "By cripes, you're not goin' to do it!"

Harlin brushed Kodd's hand away. He shifted his foot and dropped a short, hard punch to Kodd's chin. He followed with another that draped the freckled kid across the hood of a roadster. Without waiting for Kodd to recover, he went to work on him with both big hands.

Rocky forgot that this was none of his business. He hopped out of Kodd's coupe and his short legs carried him to the scene in amazingly few strides.

He pulled Harlin away from the half-conscious Kodd and said, "Pick on someone your own size, you big oaf."

Harlin looked down upon him and laughed. And all at once he ceased laughing. For Rocky had reached up and clouted him on his protruding jaw.

HARLIN SWUNG a wicked left. Rocky half-grinned and went under it. He waded into the big guy like an angry buzz saw attacking a giant spruce. The sheer force of his attack carried Harlin back. Harlin tried to shake clear, to push him

away. Rocky stayed in there, rocking the guy.

It occurred to him that once Harlin recovered from the initial shock he would mop up the area with him. But in the meantime this was good, clean fun. It was something he'd been wanting to do for a long time.

He was just getting nicely warmed up to his task when people began pawing at him. Half a dozen hands clamped about his arms and his shoulders, dragging him away from Harlin. Others were dragging Harlin.

He looked into the tense faces of the hot rod kids and said, "You clowns—whyn't you leave me alone? I wouldn't've killed him."

He saw Kodd trying to stand without bracing himself. Kodd's face looked as though he had gone through a fence at 100 miles per hour. He recalled that Kodd had taken that beating in an earnest attempt to stop these guys from hot rodding on the public roads—to pay off what he figured was a debt to Abe Berliner.

Rocky stopped straining at the hands that held him. He said, "All right, you kids go on home and play with your dolls. Because I'm going to call the state patrol and get a wagon sent out here. If they catch you, so help you." *So help Abe Berliner*, he thought.

Someone said, "You wouldn't pull a crummy trick like that, Garrison."

"Try me and see," he invited. But he knew he wouldn't. He was all bluff and a yard wide.

He got Kodd into the coupe and they drove away. He knew there would be no road racing that night. But there would be other nights and Harlin would lead them back here again. He said that to Kodd.

Kodd nodded, still wiping blood away from an eye. Kodd said, "There's only one way, Rocky. That's for somebody to prove he's a faster driver than Harlin." He paused, breathing heavily. "I'm goin' to try, so help me. I'm goin' to beat Harlin Friday night or bust my neck tryin'."

Friday night Rocky came to the track, still worrying about Kodd's promise. The kid would bust his neck trying, all right—or more likely, Harlin would bust it for him, running him through the wall or something. He suddenly wished he had as much confidence in his own driving as he had in his car. It astonished him to find his thoughts running in this vein.

They were running time trials when Yenawine, the Riach Motor Supply rep, came to the pits.

The tall man said, "Garrison, what's this I hear about you and Harlin having trouble?"

Rocky gave him a hard look. "What's that got to do with my manifold?"

"This," said Yenawine. "You go locking wheels with this Harlin and you wind up in a wooden box. Worse, your car will be a wreck. Don't forget, Riach has an investment in that car. We built that manifold of yours, because we want a chance to see if it's all you say it is."

"You'd say it was pretty good if I won a race with it, wouldn't you?"

"You don't have to win," said Yenawine. "I don't want you to win. I want you to just go out there and drive a solid, conservative race. Just turn it loose on the straightaways and I can tell well enough about that manifold."

"You want me to drag my feet. too?"

Yenawine scowled. "It ain't funny, Garrison. You go making like Barney Oldfield and get smashed up out there, and you can forget all about selling us that manifold. We won't waste time and money building you another one."

Rocky grinned. There was something comforting in the knowledge that he wouldn't have to battle his conscience about doing or dying for Abe Berliner. He had his evening's work cut out for him. It was as simple as that.

It was simple all right, through the first twenty laps. He'd been among the leaders in the inverted start but he hadn't lasted up there.

He hadn't tried to last. One car and another, and then more of them, had jockeyed past him on the turns. Kodd had been among the first to go around him. Then had come Harlin, and he'd given Harlin a wide berth, seen the guy's grin of derision as he roared by.

By now, the halfway mark, things had settled into a pattern. Kodd was out in front, with Harlin dogging him. The rest of them strung out around a full quarter-mile lap.

ROCKY GAVE grudging admiration to that Kodd up there. Harlin was trying every trick in his bag to get by the freckled kid but Kodd blocked him, hammering recklessly around the turns, his slides almost out of control, flirting with the fence and the death that lingered there.

A curious nervousness ran through Rocky. An itch to tramp down on the throttle on the turns. To shoot for the openings that occasionally loomed before him. To find out if he *could* learn to drive a racing roadster. Then he thought, *Heck, you're no speed jockey. You're a businessman, playing for stakes a lot bigger than any prize money these guys'll ever see.* But down beneath it, he felt a tiny sense of shame.

The constant drone of motors got inside him, became a part of him. The pitch and sway of the turns. The shriek of skidding tires, and the exhaust smoke hanging blue beneath the arcs. He held his own now, in the middle of the pack. Howling down out of the turns, pouring it on as he hit the straightaways. The Merc beneath his hood was a wildly roaring thing, demanding release. He knew he was choking it, as surely as a stock manifold would choke it in its own back-pressure. A kind of apathy filled him, an unpleasant sort of thing. He was using old Abe's track, and Abe's hospitality, to swing a business deal for himself. He was driving, all right, but he was driving a race.

It was on the twenty-fifth lap that it happened. From half a lap

back, Rocky could see it. He saw Harlin recklessly thrust the nose of his green mill between Kodd's roadster and the infield rail. There wasn't room but Harlin slipped in there like an eel, bent on making room.

Rocky saw sparks fly as Harlin's front wheel touched Kodd's rear hub cap. He saw the sudden twist of Harlin's wheels and the breath caught in his throat. It was a neat flip, that movement. A deft, lightning thing that might well pass unnoticed by all but a few of the watching throng. And it sent Kodd's yellow racer careening halfway up the banked macadam of the turn.

The nose of Kodd's car was pointing down-track now. Harlin could have missed it. He didn't. His front wheel struck it like a kiss of death. A glancing blow, carefully calculated, and the yellow roadster was a spinning thing heading for the fence.

Fragments of the fence boards exploded into the air. The rending noise of the crash rose high above the whine of motors. The yellow roadster lodged there among the shattered timbers, on its side, Kodd's white helmet gleaming sickly in the light of the arcs.

The yellow flag whipped out and the droning roadsters slowed, moving in a slow line like a parade of ants. Rocky felt the nausea inside him as he passed the wreckage of Kodd's mill. And the surge of anger that drove it away, a mad screaming within him that Harlin could do this and get away with it.

The yellow flag switched to red, halting the cars in position. The ambulance came out onto the track, its red light blinking like an evil eye. Rocky stood up in his cockpit, watching as the attendants gently extracted Kodd from the wreckage, shoved the stretcher into the ambulance, closed the doors. At the base of Rocky's throat, a pulse hammered loudly.

Go ahead, he told himself, get mad. But don't let it get you. Be smart, he told himself.

A DUMPY figure in a white cap caught his eye. A fat little guy scurrying along the track on stubby legs like an earnest crab in a hurry. The white cap fell unnoticed from his head as he ran; it was the first time Rocky had ever seen old Abe without the cap. Frantically, Abe waved the ambulance to a halt. Abe ran around behind it, opened the doors and floundered inside.

Rocky frowned behind his goggles. So old Abe, who loved to do his own announcing, had deserted his microphone. One of his boys had been hurt and Abe had gone to him like a mother hen. It came to Rocky that Abe must have known Kodd was driving his race for Abe tonight. But Abe was the kind of guy who would have wanted to be with a hurt kid anyhow...

Be smart, Rocky told himself again. Stay out of trouble, guy.

But when the green flag had dipped once more, he jammed his foot on the throttle and held it there. The power came back from his Merc and stirred a wild pulsing in his chest. The red-and-white roadster took off like a projectile from a gun.

He hit the south turn with the wind tearing at his face and the fence doing a crazy dance above him. His iron whip-sawed and the wheel was a brute force threatening to snap his wrists. He fought it up the bank, brushing the fence, doing a maddening tightwalk along the boards. He realized he still lacked the know-how for this sort of thing, but right now he was not sure he gave a damn.

Pouring down out of the turn, he plunged past the car ahead. His motor was wild and free and sweet. He knew the Garrison manifold was doing its job, letting the Merc put its horsepower into the wheels rather than wasting some of it pushing out exhaust gases. He knew all that and it was beautiful to know, but he didn't know what he was going to use for skill and confidence to finish this thing he was setting out to do.

Abruptly then, he ceased to worry about it. Strangely, he kept seeing little old Abe Berliner rushing out to head off that ambulance. And through the din of motors he kept hearing Kodd's voice: *Only one way, Rocky. That's for someone to prove he's a faster driver than Harlin.* If someone didn't, where would old Abe be after Harlin led the guys back onto the roads again?

The laps slipped away behind him. Gradually, the feel of the turns came to him. He learned to take them in controlled skids, so fast they were almost out of control. He passed one car and another. The night became a whirling hell of noise, a hell of rushing wind and pitching turns.

With two laps to go, Rocky had passed them all but Harlin. He was riding Harlin's tail. They hit the south turn, Harlin hugging the inside. Rocky took it high, hanging onto his control by a slim thread. He hurtled down out of the turn, pulling alongside Harlin. But at the end of the backstretch, they were still even and he was still outside forced to thrust high again, losing precious ground. It came to him he would never pass Harlin this way. It would take something more, something out of a new chapter in his racing book.

Down the grandstand stretch and into the final lap. It would be here or it would be never. He wondered how Harlin's nerve would stand up—on the receiving end.

Harlin was crowding the rail again, blocking him. He rode into it high, careening, the bucket seat jarring his spine. His hub cap touched the fence. He got it straightened out, swung with the fence. The banked track hurled him down out of the turn at maddening speed. He twisted the wheel ever so slightly, cutting at an angle for the infield rail. Driving desperately to cut in ahead of Harlin.

HHE CAUGHT a glimpse of Harlin's face, grim as death, white as the helmet above it. If Harlin refused to be bluffed—if they collided

like this, there'd be the devil to pay.

In that last hellish second, the whine of Harlin's motor broke. The green roadster's nose swung crazily spinning onto the infield. Dust rose in a billowing cloud, swallowing the green car. Rocky swept on down the stretch, whipped into the north turn. Sweat crawled around the edges of his goggles.

He got the checkered flag and rolled on around the extra lap and into the pits. He saw Harlin climbing from the green hot rod on the infield dirt. He got out of his own car, patting it gently.

A moment later Caster, Harlin's faithful follower, wheeled into the pits. He lifted his goggles, staring in wonder at Rocky.

He said, "I wouldn't of believed it. You broke Harlin's nerve like—like that!" He snapped his fingers.

Rocky grinned wearily. He guessed Abe Berliner wouldn't have to worry about these kids following Harlin's lead from now on. He stood for a moment listening. They were still yelling in the grandstand.

He was having a cup of coffee, listening to the news that Kodd had not been badly hurt, when Yenawine's tall figure halted beside him.

Rocky said, "All right, I disobeyed your orders. I'm glad I did."

Surprisingly, a slow smile broke across Yenawine's long face. "So am I. The way it worked out, you couldn't have given me a more effective demonstration. I didn't know you could drive like that, so I didn't want you taking chances."

"You live and learn," Rocky said.

"Don't kid me. You didn't know you could drive either," Yenawine said. "But you won't have to drive any more. Not with the royalties you'll be getting from us."

"The devil I won't," Rocky said. "When you get this stuff 'in your blood, you got to drive."

And tonight he had it in his blood for sure, swelling him up fit to bust. He didn't feel like a kid who'd been in jail and come out hating everybody. He just felt like a kid with worlds to conquer and he was well on his way.

SATAN IN CENTER



STARTLING
FEATURE - LENGTH
DIAMOND NOVEL
by TED STRATTON



CHAPTER I

DEEP IN center, Al Condon shifted towards left field as the Sox hitter stepped to the plate. Not a single detail of the situation actually reached his mind. Just the thought, "Gore is up," and automatically Al was crossing over and carrying the flanking rookie outfielders along with him.

Now vital facts began to be etched in his brain: one man out, Sox runners at first and second, Hawks 5 and Sox 0. *In the bag*, Al thought, then remembered that Mike Merk toed the slab for the Hawks, and added half aloud: "That lazy slob."

All around him, in the double-decked stands, the hostile crowd limbered up. Sustained sound flooded the sun-drenched diamond. Partisan noise beat at Al's ears, like waves. Last of the seventh inning, and the Sox rooters wanted a bundle of runs.

In that moment Al figuratively stuffed cotton in his ears and donned blinkers to rivet his attention on but

one thing: Gore, the hitter. Gore, the pull hitter with power in his big bat.

Mike Merk toed the rubber, posing with left foot forward and solid, gloved hand at his left thigh, ball hidden. His hands lifted high; he had long arms jointed to a squat body. He seemed more spider than pitcher.

Down with the arms. The slight shift of the runners taking a lead. Merk stood immobile, then delivered the ball. At that decisive moment, Al Condon let his arms swing loosely over weight suddenly set over toes.

Gore leaned into the pitch. *Crack!* The yelp of the crowd. The ball blazed on a line deep into the outfield, and Al was moving—swift pivot off the left foot, body swinging around, and he was off with a long stride, his back to the plate.

Patsy Flynn, the rookie right fielder, moved over. Al ordered him off with a mighty, "Mine, mine!"

YOU JUST MURDERED THE OPPOSITION, WAS THE KID'S FORMULA FOR WINNING A BALL GAME!

Patsy arced deeper, backing up the play. At the last moment, Al wheeled instinctively, and the ball came along. "Third, third!" Patsy hollered, set-the target. As the ball whistled in,

the shortstop faked a cutoff, let the ball ride through to third.

Watching, Al grunted: "Got him by a step."

The ball landed on infield clay,

Bear down, Al Condon told the moundsmen. Smother 'em, he told the infielders. Pick their line drivers out of the sky, he told the outfielders. And when you go to bat, Al told all his teammates, knock down the fence. A fighter, Al Condon was, a ballplayer who figured the way you won a game, you murdered the opposition!



ting up Al's move.

Al caught the ball. One long step, and the ball gunned towards third base. It was pretty, professionally big league, all the way. The neat catch, the long throw, the advancing runner. The Hawk's shortstop poised on the grass on a line between Al and

skidded in low. It hit the sacker's wrist, caromed past. The crowd yelped and Al groaned. It had been a perfect toss to nail the runner, but no outfielder could figure that inexplicable skid of the ball. The ad-

vancing runner scored and the runner on first zoomed into third.

"Nice throw," Patsy yelled.

"That lame-brain Merk!" Al swore, stomping outfield grass. "He stood on the mound and didn't back up third! He could have picked off that runner advancing to second and we'd be outa this!"

"We got a four-run lead," Patsy admonished, moving off.

But they got one run, Al raged thumping his glove. One run they don't deserve. That slob Merk.

Two outs, a runner on third. The crowd noise deepened. Binks, a Sox rookie, toed in at the plate. Merk slow-balled him.

"No, no," Al growled, kicking divots savagely. "Move that hitter back. Loosen him up. Try something, anything."

Merk served up a medium-speed curve. Binks rode it on a line over second base. Al charged the ball, gloved it on the second bounce, fired the ball to the shortstop before Binks crossed first base.

"Easy, easy," the shortstop warned, and Al shook his fist.

Two runs in, he thought, stomping back into an automatic, straight away position for the next hitter. Two runs in and they should have been out of the inning with no damage done. That slob Merk!

The hitter rammed the ball into the slot between Al and Patsy Flynn. Al was off with the bat crack, sprinting in at a sharp angle. He heard Patsy warn, "No, no," but he drove on. The ball sank rapidly. Al stretched down, stuck the glove across his ankles. He caught it, backhanded, for the third out. The crowd groaned. A ripple of handclaps ran around the stands.

Al flung his glove away, ran the ball in, and lobbed it to the mound. Skip Suks, the shortstop, said: "You're okay, man. Relax."

AT THE DUGOUT steps, Al heard Uncle Joe Welsh, the skipper, call out: "A very gaudy catch, Albert." The words slid off his back. How could the Hawks hope

to catch the league-leading Buc's, he wondered, when a slob like Merk failed to back up a throw? Wasn't it late August? Weren't the Buc's out front with a five-game lead?

He glared at Mike Merk. "Look," Merk said coolly, "you'll blow a fuse some day, Condon. You don't have to worry. I got this game sewed in my glove."

Al sat down suddenly. He dug his spikes into the wooden duckboards, glowered at the boards. Dehnert, the second sacker, skied out. Zack, the Greek first baseman, grounded out to the pitcher. *Five runs to two, we got 'em, Al thought. Should be five to zero.* Patsy Flynn chopped the ball towards third, lost the decision at first base by a gnat's eyebrow.

"Let's go," Al hollered, and he was the first Hawk to bolt from the dug-out.

In centerfield again he thought the situation over more calmly. What they needed, he knew, was a fourth pitcher to go the route along with Adles, Hoffman, and Priest. Uncle Joe had figured that Mike Merk would be that man. "He's a slob," Al muttered. "He don't bear down like he should."

He thought about that while Merk warmed up. Merk had everything for a starting pitcher. Fast ball, change of pace, snapped-off curve. Most of all, control. Yet, Merk was an in-and-outer, sporting a five-hundred pitching record. Adles and Hoffman and Priest had had to carry the flag rush of the Hawks.

"I got to build a fire under that crumb Merk," he thought, and eyed the hitter. Merk got the batter on a high foul. He struck out the second Sox. The third hitter whaled a long foul over the stands and the crowd exploded.

"Bear down, bear down," Al growled, thumping his glove.

The warning was wasted. The hitter followed up the long foul with a lusty triple down the third-base line and scored a moment later when Merk wild-pitched. With the Hawk's bullpen swarming with action, Merk got the hitter to ground out to second base.

"He's got the game sewed in his glove," Al thought bitterly, storming in to the bench. He strode over to Uncle Joe, growled: "You better keep that bullpen hot."

Uncle Joe Welsh was a gray-haired man with an ample stomach. A kindly man, with never a harsh word for anyone, he ran the team smoothly. "You're my right hand on the field," Uncle Joe had often told Al Condon. "I'll master-mind when it's necessary. Albert, you keep the fire lit under the boys."

Now, Uncle Joe's eyes beamed. "Tut, tut, Albert," he said softly, "no need to get ruffled. The Buc's, I see on the scoreboard, dropped a game and we'll crawl up on 'em with this win. Don't worry about Merk not backing up third base on your good throw. Just a lapse of the mind, Albert. Now you sit on the bench and rest."

Al sat down. He watched Eckstein, the catcher, foul out and Mike Merk strike out on three pitches. "Saving my strength for the ninth," Merk said, grinning, and sat down on the bench. Skip Suks, leadoff man, towered a fly over the infield for the third out.

Al surged from the dugout, waited around the mound until Merk came out. "Bear down all the way," he ordered. "Fog that ball past 'em. Just get the batter, see?"

Merk grinned. "You're quite a guy," he said casually. "A left-handed chucker, a right-handed batter. You're different, Condon. You're supposed to fire the boys up because Uncle Joe is good-natured. You're quite a fireman, too, in centerfield. Or was that seventh inning catch just Condon-lucky?"

"I play to catch 'em all."

"Sure, sure, but everybody doesn't have the strength of our fireman in centerfield, do they?"

"Bear down, Merk."

AL SPRINTED into center. Merk retired the first two Sox with his curve ball, ran into a streak of wildness, and walked the third hitter. With a two-two count on the next Sox, Merk fielded a topped

roller towards third and missed the third out by a hairline decision.

"He took all day to make the play, the crumb," Al snarled to himself, and eyed the bullpen. A lefty and a righty heated up there, but neither man was much good in a pinch. What the Hawks needed, Al knew, besides a fourth dependable starter was a good fireman who could come along in the late innings and save games. But where would the Hawks get that fourth starter or a fireman?

Lane, another rookie, batted for the Sox. *Look at him dig in at the plate,* Al thought. *Merk, you fool loosen the guy up. Try something. He's only a rookie.*

Al waved Patsy Flynn further towards center, shifted Ken Kolb nearer the left field foul line. If Lane could dig in at the plate on Merk, he might pole a long one. Lane cut savagely on Merk's good curve and missed. The Hawk's infield chattered, and Al yelled: "The way, the way, boy!"

A second curve missed on the inside. Ball one, strike one. Merk stretched, waited, pitched. Lane swung and connected. Despair in his stout heart, Al turned his back to the plate and raced for the barrier. *Not a homer,* he thought. *Let me glove it. Let me—*

The eight-foot high barrier in deep centerfield loomed ahead. Rows of shirt-sleeved fans stood on their feet, jumping and yelling. Al glanced back for the ball, found it. It would be close, he knew. How it was going to be close!

Back to the plate, eyes glued to the ball, he climbed up that wall. His gloved hand stretched up, up. The ball eluded his frantic clutch, had just enough carry to drop beyond the barrier. He hit the wall hard with his right shoulder, slid down, and crumpled at the base of the barrier.

Somebody jeered: "Home run, you bum!"

"We copped it!" another one roared.

Patsy Flynn raced up, his face tense with worry. "Al, you all right? Al, say something!"

Al said something. "That lame-brain Merk!" he sputtered. "He just stands out there and chucks that ball! He don't try nothing on the batters, the slob! Just stands out there and chucks that horsehide and lets the Sox steal a five-run lead away from him!"

Ken Kolb arrived on the double from deep left field. "Al, how's it, pal?"

Al stood up, shook himself like an angry dog after an unexpected bath in ice water. The right shoulder seemed all right. He waved off a knot of Hawks racing up, signalled he was all right. "I can catch 'em if they're in the park," he said. "But that Merk—"

With the kids flanking him, Al started for the lockers. Good rookies, both of 'em, he thought moodily. They'd come a long ways. Not quite far enough. Not quite ready for the all-out stretch drive that the Hawks would have to put on to catch the Buc's. He stopped suddenly, his eyes hard.

"Both of you," he said. "Look, I hate pitchers. I want 'em all dead. Know what they try to do to you and me? Take the bread and butter out of our mouths, that's what! Just before you swing, remember the dirty slobs are trying to take the bread and butter out of our mouths!"

He walked off, suddenly, a hulking savage figure. Patsy said, reverence in the words: "Ken, you could see his spike marks three-feet up on that barrier."

"A fighter, that guy, my kind of ballplayer," Ken Kolb agreed. "Patsy, you and I better start hating pitchers."

Ahead of them, Al mounted the wooden steps to the locker room. A heavy weight rode his shoulders. His legs were twin sticks, without animation. The right shoulder began to thump-thump with sudden pain. "You're gonna build a fire under that slob Merk," he vowed to himself. "You shoulda done it before. *Maybe it's too late, but you're sure gonna build a fire under that crumb! Yeah, tonight.*"

He opened the door, paused. In

the silence, he could hear Uncle Joe's syrupy voice: "Now, now, boys, don't take it to heart. Accidents happen. Tomorrow we'll get that game back and—"

Al Condon shivered. "Accidents!"

CHAPTER II

THE HAWKS sat at tables in the Carlton Hotel. Muted conversation all around mingled with the soft strains of the hotel's stringed orchestra. Behind him, Al Condon could hear Mike Merk laugh and he bristled.

"Relax," Eckstein, the catcher, advised. "Don't take the game to bed with you, Al."

"Bite into that steak," Patsy Flynn said, going to work with his knife and fork. Ken Kolb grinned, offered: "A long time between morning Wheaties and this steak. Um-m-m, Al."

Al listened carefully to the sounds at his back. When Merk said, "That's what I call a steak," he turned half-around and asked: "Merk, what happened to the game you had sewed in your glove, huh?"

Merk turned slowly. They stared at each other, eyes a couple of feet apart. Hot fire glowed in Merk's dark eyes. Al nodded imperceptibly. A man who had been loitering at a nearby table, stood up quickly, walked to Merk's table, and grabbed up Merk's steak.

"Now, just a minute," somebody warned, but the man walked off fast, carrying Merk's steak.

"Merk," Al said blandly, "some joker just stole your steak."

Merk wheeled around, stared. Savagely, he pushed back his chair. Al leaned back, shoved his chair between Merk and the shortest path towards the man running off with the steak. Angrily, Merk sped around the table. "I'll knock that guy's head off!" he vowed.

The steak-thief disappeared through a door. Merk trailed him belatedly. Eckstein asked curiously: "What's up, Al?"

Al grinned. "It cost me a fin to have that guy steal Merk's steak," he

explained.

"Why?" Eckstein wanted to know.

"He's a slob, see? He let a lousy rookie steal a game away from him and he didn't fight back! You know that, don't you?"

Eckstein said thoughtfully: "I caught him. Along about the seventh he seemed to tire. I told that to Uncle Joe, but—" Eckstein spread his hands flat. "Maybe he's not a nine-inning pitcher."

Al laughed. "I'll build a fire under the crumb. We need another starting pitcher. I'll fire him for a nine-inning job."

"We could use a fireman for the late innings," Eckstein said, shaking his head. "Adles shows signs lately of cracking and Priest needs help on occasion in the late innings. With a good fireman in the bullpen, we could catch the Buc's and—"

Al attacked his thick steak. "Yeah, yeah, but if that slob Merk would go all out we'd take the Buc's but good. I'll put fire in him."

Merk stormed back. "He got away!" he sputtered. "Damnation, he stole a three-buck steak on me!"

Al glanced around blandly. "What would you have done to the guy," he asked curiously, "if you'd caught him?"

"Beat his face off!"

Al smiled. "Now ain't that funny?" he said dreamily. "A guy steals your steak and you want to beat his face off. This afternoon, you got a five-run lead in the seventh and you let them Sox steal the ball game and you don't fight back. Yeah, *that's* funny. He wants to fight over a steak, but he won't fight that rookie what stole a ball game from him!"

Sudden, pregnant silence. Merk said: "Sure, you're Uncle Joe's fireman, Condon, but I don't have to take your lip!"

"You got to take it and like it," Al said.

Merk flared: "Stand up and say that, Condon."

Al stood up. "You take what I say and like it, Merk. You're a slob and—"

Burly Eckstein shouldered be-

tween the men. "Nice headline stuff for the papers," he soothed, pouring water on the fire. "Mike, sit down and order another steak." Eckstein turned, leaned his chest against Al. "Not in here, not in here," he said.

"I hate pitchers," Al breathed, his nostrils flaring in and out. "They're all lazy bums after my bread and butter."

"I don't have to eat next to a crumb bun," Merk said. Angrily he circled the table, strode out.

Al watched him. *Good shoulders, he thought. Strong arms. A spider-man with control, speed, change of pace, and a dancing curve. He could be the difference between a pennant and second place in the league. And if Merk would fight the other team—*

Al sat down. "That's just a start," he said.

Eckstein, eyes thoughtful, said: "He tired along about the seventh, Al. I told Uncle Joe that, but he wouldn't listen."

"He quit," Al said. "Watch me fire the slob."

A WEEK later, and the fighting Hawks had picked up a full game on the league-leading Buc's. They hit into mid-September, with the straining weeks ahead that would mean the pennant. Back at their home park, practicing before a night game with the lowly Seals, Al Condon eyed a coach who drilled the pitchers in the outfield.

The pitchers would group in one corner of the outfield. The coach would fungo a ball twenty-thirty yards in front of the group and a single pitcher would sprint out to make the catch. That way, the pitchers thought just about catching the fungo fly and exercised their legs. Because a pitcher is no stronger than his legs, Al and everybody else knew. Let a pitcher's legs tire in the late innings and zip! Away goes his arm and his control.

Al watched a familiar, spidery figure sprint from the group and shag a fly. Mike Merk, the pitcher the Hawks needed to cop the flag. He turned to Uncle Joe Welsh, said: "So that slob don't go all out again

in his last turn on the slab. His legs tired, Uncle Joe. It's all right with you if I fungo for him?"

Uncle Joe beamed. "You been riding him pretty hard lately, Albert. Why, I heard you even had poor Michael's steak stolen from him! In batting practice, every time Michael desires to take his cuts, you horn in and tell him he must stick to his own hemstitching, which is pitching." Uncle Joe cluck-clucked his tongue. He looked like somebody's benevolent grandfather, not a big league skipper. "Albert, you have Michael quite angry at your tactics. True, a ball player must be fired up to play his best, but sometimes, to win, you go too far, eh?"

"Don't kid a rough-neck like me," Al said softly. "We been together a long time and understand the setup. You keep playing the syrup-record and let me push the club. When I get a guy too white-hot, you come along with the butter. The guy knows I'm a louse and he thinks you're fine."

"The system works," Uncle Joe agreed. "Perhaps it is Michael's legs, not his heart, that fold up in the late innings. Just why are you carrying a fungo stick around, Albert?"

Al grinned. "To do just what you want me to do, you old fraud. I'll run that Merk until his tongue drags on his knees."

He trotted over to the perspiring coach, fungo stick in hand, and picked up a loose ball. When Mike Merk stood ready for his turn to run, Al told the coach: "Let me at the crumb."

The coach shrugged. "He's ready to claw you."

"Let him claw the other teams."

Deliberately, Al belted a long, high fungo that Merk couldn't have caught riding a bicycle. Merk chased the bouncing ball clear to the wall, picked it up. Al bellowed: "Well, get rid of it! Get it back in here!"

Merk reared back, fired away. The ball sailed in high and Al tossed the bat up to brake the throw. He missed.

Merk jeered from the outfield: "I thought you could catch 'em, fire-man!"

Al retrieved the ball. Every time Merk's turn came up, he fungoed flies that chased Merk sixty yards or battered line drives that bounced off the distant wall. Merk fought back. •Awesomely wild return pegs chased Al all over the lot.

"You got time for one more," the coach said, and Al pointed the bat, singling Merk out from the group of perspiring, tired pitchers.

He lifted the bat, poised. For the first time, he noticed the throb in his shoulder. *From that bump against the wall in the Sox game*, he thought. His neck had stiffened slightly, so that he had difficulty swiveling his head.

That slob Merk, he said, and gritting his teeth to hide the toothache pains in his shoulder, belted the ball a mile.

IN THE outer pasture, Merk cheated on this one. He got off to a running start before Al hit the ball. He rode in high gear at the bat smack. Oblivious of the barrier in center, Merk raced on, on. Somebody shouted a warning, but Merk didn't stop. Eyes glued to the descending ball, he reached up at the last possible moment, speared the ball. He crashed into the barrier, bounced, fell, and rolled over twice.

A sudden, nervous ripple of concern ran around the fans in the stands. "Cripes!" the coach snapped, and started off on the double.

Al flung the fungo bat away. He chased the coach across the grass, passed him with long, eager strides. *If he's hurt*, he thought, *you did it. A man can take so much firing up. You went too far this time. Lay off the guy.*

He shouldered through the knot of pitchers around Merk. He knelt down. Merk lay inert, eyes closed, breathing shallowly. Al's fingers probed Merk's shoulders. "Where'd you get it, guy?" he asked anxiously. "Shoulder, head, arm? Let's hear the word, guy."

The murmur of concerned voices all around. Every man on the team knew what a crash against the wall could do. Ruin a man's future in

baseball. Take the bread right out of his mouth. Stop him cold, cut five years off his baseball career. Just like that, because a wall is stronger than flesh.

"You can talk, guy?" Al said.

Merk opened his eyes, groaned. He sat up, slowly, painfully. "Lie flat," Al urged. "Sorry about that last one, guy. You all right, huh?"

"Here," Merk said weakly. With his free, right hand, he plucked the wayward ball from his mitt, thrust it into Al's paw. "I caught it, see? You're not the only guy on this club who can battle the wall for a ball."

Al wrapped his fingers around the ball. "What about it?" he demanded. "Where'd you get hit?"

Suddenly, Merk stood up. His dark face split in a grin. "Listen to the louse," he said, laughing. "You pick on me, Condon, and you drove me to the wall on that last one. Bet you thought I'd knock my brains out! Yeah, you hate pitchers, you always say! So I fooled you, wise guy. I saw the wall and braked my speed with my hands and put on an act! Did you fall for it, fireman!"

Al stared, suddenly relieved. The slob had been faking all along! The slob had pulled a fast one! The slob had—

"Maybe," Merk said, "you'll leave me alone after this and act like a human being. I'll pitch my way and you play outfield."

Merk strutted off through the knot of players. Al stared after him. *But it could have been the other way, he knew. Could have been a stretch-er case and a clanging gong on an ambulance and long days stretched out on a white cot.*

"Don't worry about him, Al," Priest, one of the dependable pitchers said. "The guy's got moxie."

"Why don't he win, then?" Al said.

They shrugged, moved off. Something chewed at the back of Al's mind. Something about Merk's work on the mound puzzled him. If not lack of moxie, what *did* hamper Merk's effectiveness? And the Hawks did need Merk's pitching. The Buc's

had a three-game lead. They'd go right down the stretch together, Buc's and Hawks. There'd be that final pair of games between the two clubs and the pennant might turn on those two games.

He strode across the outfield grass. The night lights sparkled. The green glass glittered. Subdued rumble of sounds from the still-gathering crowd. Music started up over the loud speaker system.

What ailed Mike Merk as a pitcher, eh?

He remembered that Merk had failed to back up a throw to third base in the Sox game; that Merk had failed to bear down on that blankety-blank rookie, Binks; that Binks had stolen the game from Merk. The little details mounted up. Merk not putting it out in the late innings. Merk not pushing himself, trying stuff, the way he should do to hold the lead in a ball game.

He reached the dugout steps, decided: *Merk don't try to take the bread and butter out of a hitter's mouth.* That was it. Merk just didn't have the attitude that a pitcher must have to win a nine-inning game. Or any part of a game that needed winning. How could he cure Merk, eh?

Well, tonight there were the Seals to beat...

CHAPTER III

ADLES PITCHED. He spun a noble, three-hit effort. All during the game, in the spare moments, the Hawks watched the scoreboard and watched the Robins creep up on an early Buc's lead, inch into the lead and win out by a run in the last half of the ninth. The crowd buzzed, then roared at the news.

Seals 1, Hawks 1, and they went into the last half of the ninth. Dehnert, the second sacker, drilled a screaming liner into right field that the Seal's picket man plucked off the grass tops. Kolb blasted a long drive to deep left that the outfielder picked off the barrier.

Two outs, last of the ninth. In the

batting circle, Al Condon swung his big black bat along with Old Lead-head. He tossed the heavy warmup bat away, gripped the handle of his bat. Throb—throb, in his shoulder. That shoulder wasn't getting any better. He stretched his neck, tried to loosen the muscles.

"Feeling your age?" the Seal's catcher asked with false solicitude, as Al dug in at the plate.

From the dugout, he heard Mike Merk's high-pitched voice. "Come on, boy! Ride it, ride it!" There seemed to be a jeer around the word "boy", not just a name as the players tossed it to one another.

He eyed the pitcher. The ball blazed in, letter-high, at the outside corner. He swung. The aching shoulder upset the smooth rhythm of the swing. He topped the ball, saw it roll towards third. He dug spikes into the clay, raced off.

The Seal's first baseman leaned into the baseline, blocking the bag to take the throw. Al went into him with the right shoulder. The shocking smash, the pain shooting into his brain. He rode through the baseman, stomped on the bag, stumbled.

"Go, go!" the Hawk's coach yelled.

He recovered balance, lit out for second. Above the roar of the crowd, he listened for one voice. Ten feet from second, he heard that voice. "Come on, boy! Come on, boy!"

The voice of the Hawk's coach at third base. He could figure what had happened, without looking. That topped roller had been fielded along the third base line. The throw had been wild into wide spaces behind first base, probably had rolled clear to the outer wall. Come on, boy!

He came on, eyes glued to the coach. Nearing the bag, the coach's hands dropped downward, held there, flat. Slide, boy! He slid in headlong, clawing for the bag with his good left hand. His hand hit the bag and the baseman thumped the ball on his right shoulder. No soft tag, but for the works. Muscle in the tag and pain from the tag. But safe, safe.

He stood up slowly, kicked the

bag. From all around, the noise rolled down on his head. He could see the Hawk's bench, strung along the top dugout steps. Shaking fists, hollering.

"The way to go, boy," the coach said, pounding his back, and he winced.

Zach, the Greek, lumbered to the plate. The noise deepened as the Seal's pitcher toed the rubber. Al wandered off the bag.

"Way out there!" the coach yelled at his back. "I got the baseman, Al! Get hold of it, Zach! More lead, boy! That's the ticket! Ride it, Zach!"

The pitcher wound up, delivered. Zach swung, missed, and the crowd groaned, dismayed. The coach warned: "Give Zach some help. Work on that pitcher, boy."

He nodded. He forced himself along the baseline, started to dance back and forth. On the windup, he ran far down the line, braked and started back as the pitcher delivered. He was going in the wrong direction when the ball hit in front of the plate. The catcher dropped to his knees. The ball hit his glove, slithered to one side of the plate.

Again, Al braked direction. With the pitcher racing home to cover the plate, with the catcher scrambling after the loose ball, Al rode home with all the drive he could muster. Around him gushed the thunderous sound. The catcher grabbed the ball, still on his knees. The pitcher stood erect at the plate. The catcher lobbed the ball easily for the sure out.

You hate pitchers! Al thought, and launched his big body in a low, spikes-high slide. The pitcher caught the ball. His eyes must have caught those flashing spikes. He lifted one foot out of the way of steel. It slowed his tag a fraction. Al rode across the plate. Safe, safe!

THE NIGHT filled with pent-up, animalistic cries. He stood up, shaken clear to the toes by the welling pain from his shoulder. The Hawks tightened around him, yelling and pawing his hand.

"The old fighter!" Pasty yelled.

Ken Kolb, the rookie left fielder, trailed Al, his eyes shining. "What I call good baseball!" he jabbered. "All out. You see him chill that pitcher?"

Even Mike Merk said quietly, grabbing at Al's hand: "Took you long enough, fireman, but you poured it on that time."

Uncle Joe pushed his fat stomach through the mob of players. "I knew you could do it, Albert," he said, beaming. He hooked a hand inside Al's good elbow, whispered: "How's that right shoulder feel?"

"Forget it," Al said, through clenched teeth.

"We can't afford to lose you, Albert. We're just a step behind the fading Buc's. Stick in there and see the trainer."

"You don't hear me crying, do you?"

Carefully, he stepped down into the dugout. *Oh, they'd catch the Buc's*, he knew. *Let the Buc's worry.*

Jubilation in the lockers. The glad ring of excited voices. The impromptu singing in the showers. It all felt good to Al Condon. Except the right shoulder. He showered overlong, trying to ease the pain from the shoulder with hot water. Cherry-red, he stepped from the hot shower, not daring to risk cold water on the throbbing flesh.

Already dressed, Patsy and Ken Kolb hovered near him. When Al couldn't get his shirt on, Patsy called the trainer. "Get on that rub table," the trainer ordered, after one swift look. His skilled fingers massaged the strained muscles. Al winced once, then lay quiet, eyes closed to hide the pain in his eyes.

"Hurt?" the trainer asked.

"Hurting doesn't matter," Al answered, "If anything's loose, strap it fast."

"He wants to test the barrier for size," Mike Merk said, coming up. He studied Al curiously. "I never expected to see you on a rub table, guy. I thought you were our indestructible fireman."

"I only need one good arm to handle you," Al said. "Yeah, and that's

all you need, you slob! Just the pitching arm!"

"Nothing wrong with the fireman," Merk said, turning away. "Not as long as he can swear."

The trainer bandaged the shoulder. "This will keep the muscles warm," he offered. "Should come around all right. You think we can catch them Buc's?"

"If they ride on a jet plane, we'll catch them."

He slid off the table. When the two kids tried to help him on with shirt and coat, he snarled: "A man don't get no place at all if he goes soft."

They followed him out, like dogs, their eyes shining.

CHAPTER IV

THE HAWKS ripped through a short series with the Red Wings, hit St. Loo for a three-game series. Uncle Joe put his foot down and benched Al Condon for a rest.

"Why, you crazy man," Uncle Joe said, pride in the words, "I wish I had nine men like you on the team. You can hardly lift that right arm."

"What are you going to do without me?" Al demanded. "I'll go nuts sitting on the bench."

Uncle Joe held his ground. "I've got to look ahead, Albert. The trainer says that two-three days of rest and you'll be ready for that two-game all-out series with the Buc's."

Al sat on the bench. He watched Mike Merk blow a three-run lead in the seventh inning, watched two inadequate relief hurlers get their ears pinned back by the nonchalant St. Loo's, who weren't going any place this season and could relax.

Sitting on the bench, champing and grinding his spikes into the duckboards, he saw things that he had missed from centerfield because, from the mole's-eye-view in center, you had to glue your eyes on the hitter's moves. That way, you missed what your pitcher did. Something about Mike Merk, something that he should have spotted all along, showed as he sat on the bench. Something that Uncle Joe should

have seen, probably would have seen, if he hadn't been concentrating so much on that short series with the Buc's.

Afterward, Al checked with Eckstein, the catcher. "He seemed to lose the hop off his fast one in the sixth," Al suggested.

Eckstein nodded moodily. "Tries to pace himself for the nine-innings," he agreed. "Hoffman will pitch us back into the race tomorrow."

"Hoffman, Priest, Adles—not quite enough," Al said. He spent hours that night, checking the play-by-play descriptions of the last seven games that Mike Merk had pitched. Hidden there in the prosaic figures, buried to everyone except someone with an idea, was the story of Mike Merk's downfalls. Al tucked the information away in his mind.

Hoffman beat St. Loo the next day. In the last game with St. Loo, Adles worked out of turn with Priest in the bullpen. Adles needed help in the late innings and Uncle Joe had to summon Priest who held the relaxed St. Loo's. The Hawks won by a single run.

And there it was, for anyone to see. It was a pennant race right down to the wire. Out in front all season, the Buc's had faded just enough in the stretch. They led the Hawks by one full game, with two games left with the Hawks. Anyway you looked at it, anyway you tried to figure it, the Hawks had to win both those games or kiss the pennant goodbye for another year.

Uncle Joe summoned Al Condon upstairs after the third St. Loo game. "Our pitching staff is shot to pieces," Uncle Joe said dolefully. "I've got to use Hoffman in the first game and figure he's strong enough to go the route. After that—" he shrugged.

"The Buc's were always Hoffman's cousins," Al agreed, turning the angles around in his head. The three-day rest had strengthened his right shoulder. If he didn't smack it again, if nothing happened to it, he would be all right for the important series with the Buc's.

"So we figure that Hoffman holds

the Buc's in that first game," Al mused. "If you let Priest man the bullpen, then you got Adles for the second game as a starter."

Uncle Joe sighed and his double belly jiggled with the effort. "I don't know, I don't know," he admitted. "Golly, Albert, if Hoffman doesn't hold up and I have to use Priest!"

"It'll be all right," Al said.

"All right, how?"

"I'm getting the germ of an idea," Al said cryptically.

"Maybe your right arm will strengthen so I can pitch you, Albert! You would pitch if I asked you, wouldn't you, just like you'd climb a wall for a fly, eh?"

THEY SAT in the dimly lighted office, upstairs over the locker room in the home park of the Hawk's. Through the wide windows, Al could see the lights coming on all over the city. Here and there, an early star pin-pricked the oncoming night.

He stood up thoughtfully. "I'll play, arm or no arm," he said, and the words were without heroics. "So it's Hoffman in the first game, Priest in the bullpen. Then Adles for the second game. You can have every pitcher on the roster warming up for relief. In the pinch, if it comes, you can always call on—"

He jerked to an awkward stop. Was he wrong in his hunch. Had those three days on the bench addled his brains? Was there any sense to it?

"If Adles falters?" Uncle Joe prodded hopefully.

"We'll have a man in the bullpen, hot and ready." He left the office quickly, thought as he hit the stairs: *Sure, there'll be a man ready in the bullpen. Wouldn't every pitcher be in the pen for the Buc's series?*

Downstairs, when he reached the lobby, Ken Kolb and Patsy Flynn were waiting. They hurried forward, eyes lighting up. "We've been waiting a half hour," Ken said.

"Not necessary at all," Al said, but he was pleased. "I can find my way to the restaurant."

"How's the arm?" Patsy rattled off. "You think we can take the

Buc's in the two-games? Who'll pitch the first one, eh? Can Hoffman cousin 'em?"

Ken cut in with: "I hear Priest's arm is sore. Can he go more than two-three innings?"

"Man," Patsy said, "we missed your big bat and defense in the St. Loo series. Paker's a good picket man, but lacks your hustle."

Al laughed shortly. "Stop worrying, you kids. We don't have the worries. We don't lead in the league race. How do you think the Buc's feel, eh? They lost their lead. They'll worry, but we won't. All you two kids have to think about is hating the Buc pitchers, see? They'll try to grab the bread and butter from your mouths. No, not bread-butter. World's series, see? Those Buc pitchers will try to grab caviar off your plates! Hate 'em, kids."

CHAPTER V

THE LOYAL fans jammed the stadium for that first game with the Buc's. They crowded the aisles, lined the runways four deep, and hung from the rafters. They cheered the Hawks in batting and fielding practice, jeered the Buc's good-naturedly. The town had caught fire. There was pennant fever in the air.

Hoffman pitched. In the fourth inning, covering first base on a grounder to Zach, the Greek, Hoofman tripped over the bag and turned his ankle. Uncle Joe Welsh had to fetch Priest, one of his three dependable pitchers in from the bullpen. Meanwhile, the Buc's grabbed a one-run lead and clung to it.

The Hawks fought back. In the last half of the seventh, Al slid into second, re-injured his shoulder. Worst of all, was the fact that he died at second, never did get a chance to shove the tying run across.

He stormed around the outfield in the eighth, hollering at the two kids flanking him, yelling encouragement to Priest on the mound. He pounded glove with good hand. At every opportunity, he exercised the right shoulder, but it didn't do any

good. The pain grew, the muscles stiffened.

"We'll get 'em, we'll get 'em," he growled at himself. "Got to get 'em. Got to win it."

And tomorrow, now that they were down to one pitcher? Tomorrow? There'd be no tomorrow, if they didn't get that one run back and more! Priest got the first two men. The third hitter for the Buc's in the eighth golfed a long fly between Al and Patsy. He ran far back and over, turned for the ball, only to find that it was going to clear his head.

"Patsy, Patsy!" he yelled, easing off the ball. "Patsy!" he yelled frantically. He saw the kid in a blur, running like the wind. If that ball went through, it could be a triple, possibly an inside-the-park home run.

At the top of his long, racing stride, young Patsy gunned up and gloved the ball. The fans really gave it to the nervy kid. Al hugged him with the good arm, hollered: "The way, boy! You got that butter-bread complex, boy!"

"For caviar," Patsy corrected. "Hang it up on the wall, pal, and I'll climb for it."

In the last of the painful eighth inning, the Hawks went down one-two-three. Bit by bit, inning by inning, it trickled away from them. That one run they needed to tie. Those two runs they needed to win. They had only the ninth inning and the cry ran around the infield, echoed in from the outfield, rose from the hungry crowd to "Hold 'em, hold 'em."

Priest kept out of trouble, getting the first two Buc's to face him. Working too craftily, he walked the next Buc. Priest settled on the mound too quickly and the umpire stepped aside when Priest pitched and yelled: "Balk, balk," and motioned the Buc runner down to second.

Fierce and loud, the protests were howled from the stands, but the decision held. In center, Al prowled his sector. Would Uncle Joe walk the next hitter to get a force play at second base? That would bring

up the Buc's catcher, a notoriously bad ball hitter. Sound, to walk that dangerous hitter at the plate. Sound, and—

No sign from Uncle Joe. So Priest missed pitch. Al waved Patsy over, shifted himself, and wig-wagged for Ken Kolb to play tighter. *So there would be no run scored on a single*, he told himself, but he knew it was a gamble. A pull hitter at the plate, and Priest would keep the ball on the outside.

But Priest lost momentary control, served up an inside pitch. Instantly, Al spotted the danger. With the ball not yet to the hitter, Al galloped towards a deep spot in left field. Before the bat crack, he yelled at Ken: "On the toes, boy," and ran.

Crack of the bat, at the plate. He knew what that meant. You played a lifetime in the outfield and you never had to wait for the flight of the ball to tell you what the hit was like. At the impact of bat against ball, sometimes, you turned tail and dusted for the distant fences. Another time, with only a shade of difference in the sound of wood on ball, you bolted towards the infield. This time, the crack had been flat, not sharp, and he knew it for what it was—a sinking line drive.

"In, in!" Al bellowed, knowing that the Buc runner on second base would be high-tailing for the plate on the hit.

WITHOUT hesitation, answering Al's call, young Ken Kolb started in. He had a good jump on the ball. Racing over behind him to back up the play, Al knew it would be close. If the kid didn't crack at the last second. If the kid kept driving, driving—

Ken roared in, lowered his shoulders, and dove. He plucked the sinker off the grass blades, stumbled, toppled and went down. He came up with the ball for the third out and the crowd roared.

Al sprinted in, hollered: "The way, boy! It took guts!"

"It took you," Ken said. "Let's get us some fat runs."

Nobody sat down. Everybody ranged the dugout steps. His face

white as pancake flour, Uncle Joe babbled: "We gotta get some hits, you bums! This is it, ain't it? You blankety-blank chumps, get some runs or—or we're busted!"

Eckstein, the catcher, fingered Al, whispered hoarsely: "We're gonna have trouble with the old boy. You didn't hear him out in center, but he's been cursing and yowling on the bench. Why didn't he walk that hitter to get at the Buc's catcher, huh?"

Al walked over to Uncle Joe. "Runs, runs," Uncle Joe babbled at the top of his voice, and Al snapped: "Sit down and shut up."

Plaintively, Uncle Joe hollered: "Only two runs, we need, you clown! Two runs, you hear?"

Al turned away. He stood on the top step. *Up to you*, he thought. *The old man blew his top. First, Hoffman's ankle. Then, no runs.*

From every side of the ball park, rose the hungry cries. In one long, continuous roll of noise, the crowd opened up as Eckstein stepped to the plate. Eckstein wasted no time. He drilled the first pitch into right field for a single and bedlam let loose.

A pinch hitter strode towards the plate and Al stopped him. "Wait," he ordered, taking charge. He could hear Uncle Joe babbling, "Home run, home run," but that wasn't the way to play it.

Al fingered Priest, the pitcher, ordered: "We can't take a chance. Lay it down and we'll get that run around for you."

Priest stared. "You think my arm 'ul last all night?"

"I'm not worrying about your arm. Lay it down." Al flashed the sign to the coaches.

They pitched high to Priest, twice. Then, the Buc's pitcher had to come in with the serve. Priest nubbed it with the bat. The ball trickled towards first base. Eckstein thundered towards second. The Buc's basemen pounced on the ball, wheeled, hesitated. Then, turning, he tossed to first base for the first out.

Al told Skip Suks, the next hitter: "If they're deep, boy, drag it.

They'll figure you to hit away, boy. If they're deep, drag it. Set up that score."

Skip nodded and Al flashed the sign. The infield hesitated, eyed the Buc bench, and caught their flashed sign. They shifted semi-deep. Good, Al thought, kneeling down.

Skip dug in deep, his hands low on the bat. The Buc pitcher poised, delivered. A fast curve. Instantly, Skip shortened his grip, punched at the ball. It rolled towards third base. Eckstein roared down to third as the hot corner guardian scooted in. Skip beat out the drag bunt for a hit.

Two ducks on the pond now, but the Hawks needed that one run, first. Al warned Dehnert, the chunky second sacker. "Get a piece of it. A long fly will do the trick, Denny. Look, we've been first ball hitting. Don't figure him to come up with the first toss. Wait for the one you want and poke it deep. That one run, boy."

Dehnert nodded, strode purposefully to the plate. The tension mounted. Ninety feet, was all that the Hawks needed to tie the game at one-all, send it into extra innings if they couldn't get two runs. Dehnert dug in, lifted and cocked the big bat.

The slow, crawling passage of long seconds. The delivery. It was a low pitch, but Dehnert didn't bother about that. He swung from the heels. He hit over the ball. It landed ten feet from the plate, bounced twice, and the Buc pitcher collared it.

You call this one, Al thought, waiting. There were three possible plays, he knew, but you call it.

First, drive the Hawk runner back to third, then fire to first. Second, fake a toss to second, whirl, and fire to third to pick off Eckstein and kill the tying run. Or, and this was the correct play, pivot, fire to second base for the force-out and the relay to first base for the double play, the ball game, the pennant, and a big chunk of World Series dough.

YOU CALL IT.

Maybe the Buc pitcher got rattled. Maybe, all he could think about, was that big, tying run at third base,

Anyway, he ran towards third base and Eckstein scrambled back and slid in. With that much time lost, the Buc pitcher flubbed the easy double-play, fired to first and knocked off Dehnert for the second out.

INSTANTLY, Al was on the prowl. He lugged a bat to the circle and grabbed Old Leadhead. Old Leadhead, that the batters swung for the extra weight Old Leadhead carried. Old Leadhead—

While the brains of the Buc's gathered at the mound, Al leveled those two bats and swung, again and again. He put all his strength into it. He forced himself to forget the pain that shot up his right arm, through his shoulder, and into his protesting brain. He put on an exhibition of hitting, while the Buc's brains figured the angles and the crowd howled.

For there was Eckstein on third base, the tying run; there was Skip Sucks on second, the lead-run; and there was first base, wide open, daring the Buc's to walk young Ken Kolb to get at Al Condon. The intentional walk would set up force plays at every base—if the Buc's dared to try it that way.

The conference on the mound broke up. The Buc catcher settled behind young Ken Kolb. Al waited a moment, then strolled to the plate. He pulled Ken Kolb aside, whispered something. The kid nodded. "Easy, easy," Al warned gently. "Relax, boy. It's their worry, not yours."

"And we hate pitchers," Ken said, and walked into the box.

Al tossed away Old Leadhead. The released weight did not help his sore arm and shoulder. The arm hung there, dead. He had known it was dead, useless. But he had put on the show for the brains of the Buc's to see. He had done his bit. It was up to the rookie. He knelt a few feet from the plate, leaned on the bat.

A high, inside pitch, and Ken dropped flat. Then, a duster, fired right at the kid's cap to loosen him up. The crowd jeered, angrily, and Al called: "Easy, boy, easy."

Two balls, not a single strike thrown. So that was the strategy. Loosen the kid up. Wasn't he a rookie? Flatten him. He was only a kid in a climax, right? Scare the wits out of him. Now, HE'S YOURS, PITCHER. The game is yours. The pennant is yours.

Third pitch, a snapping, dancing curve. Ken waited until the last moment, measured the curve for size, and swung. The sharp, sweet sound of the bat crack. The ball streaking between the basemen on the right side of the field. Both men, lunging, diving. The ball rocketed between them, continued its merry, sweet way into right field. Eckstein rode home. Skip Suks, wings on his spikes, tore around third base and rode home. The Buc outfielder grabbed the ball, poised, and fired needlessly to home plate.

The crowd cut loose. They tore the roof off the stadium. Down at first base, young Ken Kolb knelt and kissed the bag. When the jubilation died, belatedly; when the Hawks had rioted in the dressing room and showered; when Uncle Joe Welsh had jabbered, "We got runs, two big runs, two of 'em, oh-mygod"; young Ken Kolb came over to Al Condon.

"How's the arm, champ?" he asked.

"Can't lift it," Al groaned. "I couldn't have swung a bat if they had walked you. You know that, don't you?"

"But they didn't know it," Ken said. "And if you hadn't put it up to me, saying I had to do it because you couldn't, I couldn't have done it either. We hate pitchers, right?"

"Not that stout heart, Priest. Not Hoffman or Adles or—" He paused before the name. MIKE MERK.

So it would be Adles tomorrow for all the marbles. Adles as far as he could go. Then—

Mike Merk never was a nine inning pitcher. Al thought. He's a perfect fireman and we missed it all season. Control. Fast ball. Snapping curve. And guts. We could be sitting pretty right now if we'd realized that Merk didn't have the strength to go nine innings.

That's what the record book had

told Al, when he'd checked back. Four-five innings of faultless ball, then Mike Merk had had to slow down, to pace himself in order to go the distance. And in pacing himself, he had lost the hop on his fast one, lost the sharp edge of his control. If they'd only spotted that sooner, the pennant would be flying from the pole in centerfield. They wouldn't be tied with the Buc's with the final game tomorrow.

"Thank God for tomorrow," he muttered. They would be all right with Mike Merk in reserve—if Adles could go five innings. He walked over to the rub table, lay down, and groaned; "Do what you can, guy."

And the trainer said: "I'll cut the arm off, pal. It's no good to you just hanging there."

CHAPTER VI

TOMORROW.

No, today.

The Hawks had batted in practice. They had fielded in practice. Now, they sat silent and relaxed for a few minutes while the grounds-keepers manicured the clay and re-laid the white lines on the diamond. Just the short, last few moments together.

To relax them, Al Condon said dreamily: "After the World Series, I'm gonna take a case of beer and a gun. Not just any gun, but a honey-gun that can't miss Maine partridge. Just me and a lonely lake and a cook-fire and a couple of partridge roasting in an open oven. That's me, after the World Series."

"No women?" Dehnert, the vet, prodded.

"No sport pages, no radio, no tension. Just me and that good old gun and plenty of shells and—"

The side door banged open, like a gunshot. They turned, as one man, and Uncle Joe Welsh stood there. Bloodshot eyes. Jaw hanging loose. Wide mouth open. Unhealthy red spots of color in his cheeks. He staggered into the room, almost fell. They could smell the whiskey on his breath at ten paces. He hiccupped drunkenly and a shiver ran around the room.

"Hoffman's s'no good to ush," Uncle Joe babbled, flapping his wide mouth. "Adles hesh gotta go nine—er, nine innings. Me, I don' feel so good, you blankety-blank crumb bums. You hear me? You blankety-blanks hear me, huh? Nobody ina bullpen, nobody and—"

The club secretary appeared behind Uncle Joe, grabbed him, hauled him from the locker room. The door banged ominously. The slow release of pent-up fear and—

"Always take plenty of shells along." Al Condon drawled, without missing a heartbeat. "Sometimes there's no partridge and other times you kick one out of every corpse. So take plenty of shells along. After the World Series, I'm heading for that lonely, blue lake where there won't be any radio or no tension and—" He stood up, and his dark eyes swept the faces of the tense, good men all around him. He grinned at their silence and swept away their fears. "And I'm taking no whiskey along with me, either. Let's go take these bums, gang."

THE SUDDEN, sharp, stirring sounds of men on the prowl. The clatter of spikes on concrete. The opening of the door and the outside crowd noise shooting inside to prick the backs of the necks. Al walked to Mike Merk, said: "Just a second, fellow."

Merk waited until the door closed. "No hard feelings?" Al asked, and Merk shook his head.

Al laid it on the line. "If Adles cracks, we're at the end of the rope, fellow. Hoffman will be out with that ankle for two-three more days. Priest is tired, dog-tired. Sure, he'll pitch if Adles cracks, but that's where you come in, fellow."

"Me?" Merk asked, puzzled.

"We missed it all season. You should have been our fireman for the late innings. Can do, fellow. Can do today, fellow. I was wrong about you. I—well, I thought that you lacked moxie and I was wrong. You just couldn't pitch nine innings strung together and we missed it. Today's different. You're rested. If

Adles can go five innings, you can finish up."

Merk nodded thoughtfully. "Uncle Joe's idea?"

"My idea."

"He'll go along—if he sobers up?"

"He'll sober up and he'll be on the bench and he'll go along."

"You know," Mike Merk said, smiling, "I had you pegged, all along, for a prime louse, Condon. Always itching, always fighting, always prodding. Then, riding me. I've seen you climb the barrier half a dozen times this season and took it as a matter of course. Not until that night before the Seals game when you chased me to the wall with that last fungo did I really know how good you were. That wall jumped up in my face. I was scared clear to my corns. I was mad, too. I didn't want to chase that ball. I did. Later, I thought about the kind of raw courage it takes for you to climb a wall after a fly to—to save a pitcher's job. Okay, pal?"

"Okay, pal."

They trotted out together, into the swelling sound...

CHAPTER VII

ADLES pitched for the Hawks and set the Buc's down one-two-three. The Hawks sprinted to the dugout. Al spotted Uncle Joe in his usual corner. A white-faced Uncle Joe with putty lips and a cracked smile. "I don't know what hit me," Uncle Joe whispered hoarsely. "I kept hitting the bottle and it don't hit me and then it does! What a head I got today, Albert. Gosh, the club secretary he bawled me from here-to-there and used cracked ice on my head. Albert, don't go far from me, boy. I gotta think."

"Try prayers, too," Al snapped. "The syrup certainly strained outa your makeup. You won't fool a Hawk from here in, you fraud."

"It was the close race and the World Series' fever," Uncle Joe complained, as Skip Suks marched to the plate.

Skip walked. Dehnert drilled a hit to left, which put Hawk runners on first and second. Ken Kolb

stepped up. Al strode out, wielding a big bat and knelt off the plate. The Buc's pitcher dusted Ken off. Ken held tight at the plate until the last fraction-second, failed to duck cleanly out of the way. The ball stung him between the shoulder blades. Three Hawks crowded the sacks with no outs.

Into the mad music of partisan fandom, Al strode to the plate. *One good hit*, he thought, *and we can bag it.*

And he carried that good hit in his bat. Whatever plagued his shoulder, it was nothing permanent. Nothing that a week's rest wouldn't cure. So, the trainer had soaked the shoulder in the whirlpool and rubbed hot-stuff on the muscles and bandaged the flesh for warmth. The relaxed shoulder had temporary power. The shoulder might even go nine innings. It would stand up for one all-out effort, Al knew.

He watched the Buc's infield edge in until the left side was on the baseline and the right side was semi-deep. He dug the right foot in deep, planted the left foot forward. He cocked the bat, swung easily. The power was there. The snap was there. Just let that Buc pitcher dare feed in a good one. Just let the silly slob try to steal caviar off the Hawks' plates!

Anger growled inside him, powered his muscles. He took a ball on the outside. "Get it over," he jeered at the pitcher.

Ball two, inside. The racket deepened. The nervous pitcher, on the verge of being yanked, curved the ball in. Al tensed, whipped the bat around. CRACK, like a shot from a heavy .48r. A sweet, solid, satisfying sound, like no sound on earth. The sound of a hit, a runs-producing hit. Crack, and—

A line drive screamed towards the second baseman. The Hawk runners started for the next base, suddenly braked. The Buc's second sacker dove to his left. Thud, and the ball stuck in his glove. He stumbled, recovered, and fired the ball to first base. Double-play. Two outs for the Hawks. Runners still on second and third, but two outs.

For a long moment, Al stood at the plate, sizzling with anger. In the short silence, some dead-head fan bellowed: "You big bum!"

Al strode from the plate. Waiting to hit, young Patsy said: "The toughest break a good guy ever got!" Al didn't hear him. He tossed the bat down, stormed into the dug-out.

"Ohmygod," Uncle Joe groaned. "Everything's against us."

Al stomped along the duckboards to the water cooler. His hands trembled. He mashed the dixie cup savagely, jerked out a second cup. He could feel the old pain begin to throb in his right shoulder. *You're through at the plate, through,* he thought bitterly. *Damn that shoulder. Damn that slob of a pitcher. Damn that screeching liner. Two feet either way and two runs in and no man out. Damn that—*

Young Patsy Flynn's bat thundered. The crowd exploded and Al turned. Way out there, on a line faded, faded. It landed in the fourth row of seats, home run. Home run by a rookie in the clutch. Three fat runs for the Hawks. Three runs, three runs!

Al was at the plate when young Patsy crossed. He hugged the kid, kissed him, yelled in his ears the glad, little things that come into expression in the big moment. "We hate pitchers," Patsy said. Zack, the big Greek, struck out, but it didn't matter. The Hawks had three fat runs.

THE INNINGS rolled along. A new Buc pitcher took over on the mound and stilled the thunder in Hawk bats. Adles, pitching his heart out with that three-run lead, cooled off the Buc batters. Al Condon was everywhere, counteracting the bite in Uncle Joe Welsh's tongue. He patted backs. He buttered the rookies. He chattered incessantly.

Five innings rolled by. Hawks 3, Buc's 0. Four innings left. Just twelve men to get and the Hawks had the pennant and World Series dough in the bank. Safe in the bank, too.

With one Buc out in the sixth inning, Adles faltered. From center-field, Al could see the long, tense season catch up with Adles. He could hear the two sharp ringing singles off Buc bats and could see the hop fade from Adles' fast one. A man couldn't pitch out of turn, couldn't come back with too short a rest and go nine innings.

He glanced at the bullpen. Five pitchers heated up zealously. Priest, Mike Merk, a couple of so-so's, and Hoffman, bad ankle and all. Al called in to Skip Suks: "Tell Uncle Joe to take him out," and Skip called time and trotted in to Uncle Joe.

Nothing happened, except that Skip trotted back, patting Adles' shoulder in passing. So Uncle Joe had decided to let Adles stay in! Adles gave it all he had, but it wasn't enough. He walked the next batter.

Al roared in from center, met Uncle Joe and Adles at the mound. "Good guy," Al said to Adles, and Adles tried to smile.

"I wanted him to pitch to one more batter," Uncle Joe grumbled. "The crumb bun's got all Winter to rest up. He could have made it."

Adles shrugged. Al said: "Fetch Mike Merk in."

"Merk?" Uncle Joe stared. "You nuts? I'm running this club." He signalled for Priest and Priest began the long walk to the mound.

"Priest is tired," Al protested. "Merk's rested and ready. He's got the kind of a curve we need in this pinch. He's got control. He's a fireman, good for four-five innings at top speed. If we'd been smart all season, Merk would have been our fireman and—"

"Shut up," Uncle Joe growled. He turned to Priest, ordered: "Fog it past 'em, boy."

Al retreated to deep center, waved the rookies around to the right. No telling what Priest would do. He *might* come through. He eyed the bullpen, motioned Merk to keep chucking hard.

When Priest was ready, the crowd quieted. Priest fired two successive balls. He laid one in the groove. The

Buc hitter lined the ball for a hit into left and two runs scored and the Buc runner on first ambled around to third. Still, one out. Priest proceeded to load the sacks with a walk.

Al took over. At the mound, before Uncle Joe could get there, Al told Priest; "You did your best, boy," and Priest snarled, "I don't have it in the arm today."

Before Uncle Joe could reach the mound, Mike Merk was coming in. Uncle Joe snapped: "What's this, Condon?"

"What we should have done when Adles went sour."

"I'm running this club!" Uncle Joe bawled. "I'm—"

"Shut up," Al ordered. He turned to Mike, said: "Curve 'em, boy. Curve 'em."

"Fireball 'em," Uncle Joe said, slobbering.

Gently, Al turned Uncle Joe around, steered him towards the dugout. "You just go sit this out," he urged. "You'll be lucky to have a job because of the whiskey trick. If we lose this one, you won't have a job."

He watched Merk warm up, grinned, and said: "For all the marbles, boy."

"They're after my bread-and-butter," Merk said, and Al retreated to over the left fielder's head, the ball centerfield.

The Buc hitter stung Merk for a long, towering fly to deep center that Al pulled down close to the wall. The second out, but the runners moved up a base. That knotted the score at 3-3. Like that, and the Hawk's long lead had faded, like snow before a hot sun.

DELIBERATELY, Al ordered a walk to load the sacks. Then, with three straining Buc's on the bases; with two men out and the score tied; Mike Merk, working faultlessly, struck out a Buc and the rally was over and the long cheers rolled down on the diamond.

No runs for the Hawks in the last of the sixth. Merk set the Buc's down in order. Despite the crowd standing for the last of the seventh,

the Hawks failed to score. The eighth inning inched past with no more runs scored. Then, the first of the ninth, the score still knotted at 3-3.

Merk struck out a Buc. The next man singled. On a slow dribbler to the mound, the runner reached second, but there were two outs. Al Condon reviewed the Buc hitters. First man, a lefty, a clutch-man. Then, a pull-hitter to left. That was the Buc's order at the plate.

Let Merk work on the lefty? Try to keep that runner from scoring? What to do? He made his decision, relayed the information to Skip Suks, who carried it in to Mike and tipped off the Hawks. **WALK THE LEFTY.** Put it up to Merk and the pull hitter to left.

Two Buc's on base, now. Two outs. Pull-hitter at the plate.

Al motioned Ken Kolb to hold position, deep, and Ken nodded. He waved Patsy nearer the right-field base line. The kid hesitated at the unorthodox procedure, shook his head, and obeyed. For the pull-hitter, Al left a wide hole between himself and Ken Kolb, moved to the right side of centerfield.

A gamble, he thought. You're trusting Mike's control. If he fails, the Hawks are sunk and so are you. But if he pitches to the outside on the pull-hitter, keeps the ball there—

Merk broke off an outside curve for a strike. Then, a ball. Then, another outside curve. The hitter tensed, started the swing. Eyes glued to every move of the pull-hitter at the plate, Al moved to his left. He heard the bat crack, knew he was right, and loped into deep right center to snare the line drive near the wall for the third out and the crowd released pen-up breath.

"And I thought you had gone nuts, pal," Patsy said, and Al snapped, "We need a run, just one run."

Dehnert fouled out, starting the ninth. Ken Kolb blasted a long fly to center for the second out. Al Condon stepped in to hit. The throb of his shoulder. *You can't hit.* He wagged the bat savagely. *No*

power in the shoulder. He waited. *You can't trust the shoulder. You know that, don't you?* He knew it.

Ball one. He waited, took a strike. Ball two. Then, a second strike. He hadn't swung the bat, once. He swung easily on a curve, fouled it off. He fouled off two more curves, then took a ball. Ball three, strike two, and two outs.

"He can't hit, can't hit," the Buc catcher urged his pitcher. "Lay it in, boy."

Two more fouls, then a third. "I can do this all day," Al said, and the catcher growled, "That's all you can do."

Then, into the tumult of sound, the Buc pitcher delivered. Al took ball four. At first base, he told the coach: "I couldn't hit. I had to use the head."

"What about Patsy?" the nervous coach wanted to know.

Al made an imperceptible sign and the coach stared. "But you can't—"

Al grinned. *No, he thought, you can't hit. But you can run. Your legs are all right.*

He eased off the base, eyes glued on the pitcher. The pitcher's poise, the slight motion towards Patsy, and Al was off for second. Head down, feet working, he tore for second. Halfway there, he heard the bat crack. Head still down, he cut the sack close, and heard the third base coach cry into the rising noise: "Come on, boy!"

IN A DRIVING rush, Al headed for third. He saw the coacher lift his hands high, palms flat, in the familiar "stop" signal. *So it was a single,* Al knew. From long experience, he knew it was a single, a ball looped deep between the Buc's left and center fielders. The movements of the defenders out there had told him he was right.

But he knew more than that. He knew exactly what the first outfielder to the ball would do. Glove the ball, wheel, and fire in to second base. So, he slowed as he reached third. Slowed just enough to fool the Buc's.

Then he clipped the inside of

third base with a spike, lowered his shoulders, and set sail for home. Run. That was all he knew. Run, run, run. Take a chance. Figure the Buc's would fire to second. Had to figure that way! They needed a run, right? Mike Merk could go one more inning, no more, and they were finished. One more inning and more than that they couldn't risk.

RUN, RUN, RUN. From first to home, on a single!

All around him, lifting in a great flood of sound, the crowd came alive, began pounding the boards in fear, began lifting their prayers to the sky. He could see the catcher blocking the plate and the Buc's pitcher behind him.

Three more steps, and the Buc's catcher reached for the ball. He had to reach to his right, away from third base, to take the relayed throw. Forgetful of the pain in his right shoulder, blotting out everything except his concentration on the plate, Al launched his body. All out, every step of the way.

Plate...swiftly bending-down
Catcher...flash of white ball in his
hand...sure tag...and—

Al lifted his right foot, kicked deftly. Shoe against wrist. Shoe against flesh. The flesh gave. The ball rolled away. Al slid across the plate, lay there, aching, hurting.

THIS RUBE'LL BE READY!

style. You've come along pretty well by hit-or-miss, kid, but it's time you tackled this thing with some system."

Rudy felt a tear start at the corner of one of his eyes. It had all worked out so swell, and an hour ago, he wouldn't have given two cents for his chances. It had been a terrible decision he had made, up there in the ring: Whether to prolong the agony of the uneven match as long as he could, or to fake being scared of the veteran battler.

He had known in his heart he had no chance of winning. So his choice had been one not of winning or losing, but of how to lose, whether in disgrace or with honor.

"How did you know, Matt?" he asked thickly.

They had the run. They had the game. They had the pennant. They were in the World Series.

The sound hit him. It buried him. He was up on his feet, and running out towards second base. He raced past downcast, cursing Buc's, raced through deafening noise. He grabbed young Patsy Flynn, kissed the kid unashamedly. Tears rolled down his cheeks.

"You hate pitchers, the slobs," Al said, and Patsy hollered: "The blankety-blank slobs, I hate 'em!"

Hawks collared them. From bullpen and dugout, they gathered round. They hoisted Patsy and Al on their shoulders, fought their way to the dugout through a surging, pressing crowd of maniacs.

"A fighting ball player!" Mike Murk shouted, and they yelled it at Al.

Fighting, fighting, that was it, Al thought. You had to build a fire under every man on the team. But first, you had to build a fire under yourself. There was no other way. You had to have it first.

He slid off willing shoulders, found Uncle Joe Welsh and said: "It's all right, all right."

And Uncle Joe said: "Ohmygod, from first to home on a single. Albert, we'll win that World Series."

They would, Al Condon knew.

(Continued From Page 30)

"What, kid?"

"That I was faking up there, I'm not yellow?"

"Heck," Matt Webb snorted. "I was a fighter myself, kid, remember? I been in and around this game all my life. I seen 'em come and I seen 'em go, I seen lots of changes. But there's one thing in this racket that never changes. It's something inside a man. Courage. I knew you had the guts, kid, the first time I laid eyes on you up there."

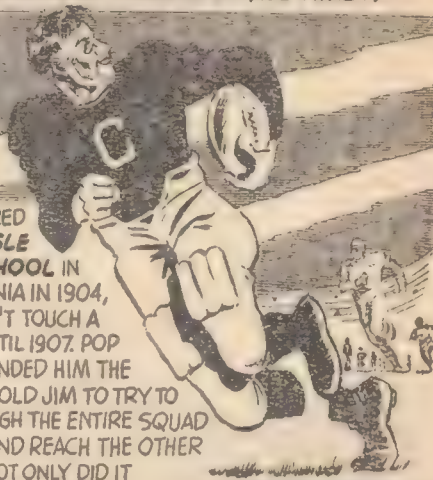

Rudy felt his throat jamming a little. In losing to Bobo Pittman, he had apparently gained the whole world. He had never been so moved by another man's tribute.

"Thanks, Matt," he said thickly. "And believe me, I'll never quit on you out there."

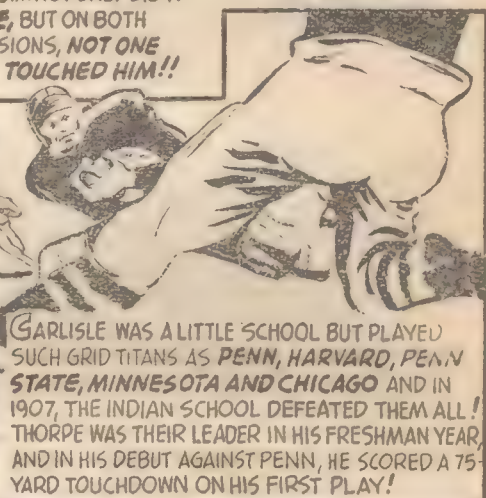

JIM THORPE

HALF MAN-HALF LEGEND!!


THIS IS THE STORY OF JAMES FRANCIS THORPE, A POOR SAC AND FOX INDIAN BOY WHO MANY CLAIM TO BE THE GREATEST ALL-AROUND ATHLETE OF ALL TIME !!



JIM ENTERED THE CARLISLE INDIAN SCHOOL IN PENNSYLVANIA IN 1904, BUT HE DIDN'T TOUCH A FOOTBALL 'TIL 1907. POP WARNER HANDED HIM THE BALL AND TOLD JIM TO TRY TO RUN THROUGH THE ENTIRE SQUAD (60 MEN) AND REACH THE OTHER SIDE. JIM NOT ONLY DID IT TWICE, BUT ON BOTH OCCASIONS, NOT ONE MAN TOUCHED HIM!!



CARLISLE WAS A LITTLE SCHOOL BUT PLAYED SUCH GRID TITANS AS PENN, HARVARD, PENN STATE, MINNESOTA AND CHICAGO AND IN 1907, THE INDIAN SCHOOL DEFEATED THEM ALL! THORPE WAS THEIR LEADER IN HIS FRESHMAN YEAR, AND IN HIS DEBUT AGAINST PENN, HE SCORED A 75-YARD TOUCHDOWN ON HIS FIRST PLAY!

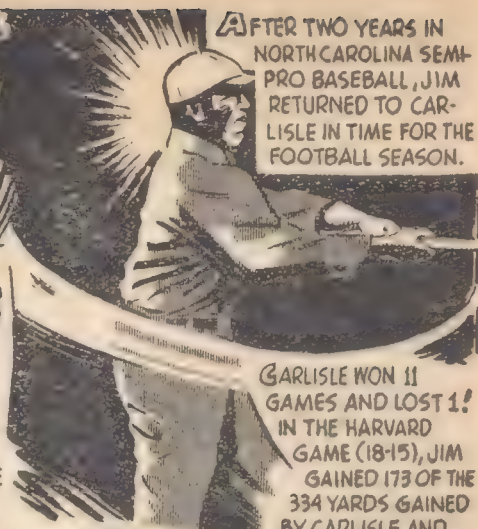


FOOTBALL WASN'T THORPE'S ONLY SPORT. IN THE SPRING OF 1908, HE WENT OUT FOR CARLISLE'S TRACK TEAM. POP WARNER, WHO COACHED EVERY MAJOR SPORT AT CARLISLE, TOLD HIM HE WOULD TAKE JIM TO THE PENN RELAYS IF HE COULD PRACTICE JUMP 5 FEET 10 1/2 INCHES. JIM JUMPED 5 FEET 11 INCHES AND THEN WON THE RELAYS HI-JUMP EVENT WITH A 6 FOOT, 1 INCH JUMP!



THE CARLISLE GRID TEAM, UNDER THORPE'S DRIVING INSPIRATION, WON TEN GAMES, LOST TWO AND TIED ONE IN 1908. THE FOOTBALL WORLD BEGAN TO TAKE NOTICE OF THIS SUPERB FOOTBALL MACHINE AND AS A RESULT OF HIS GREAT SEASON, WALTER CAMP CHOSE THE INDIAN FLASH FOR HIS THIRD TEAM ALL-AMERICA!!

Thorpe Runs and Kicks Team to Win Over Penn State

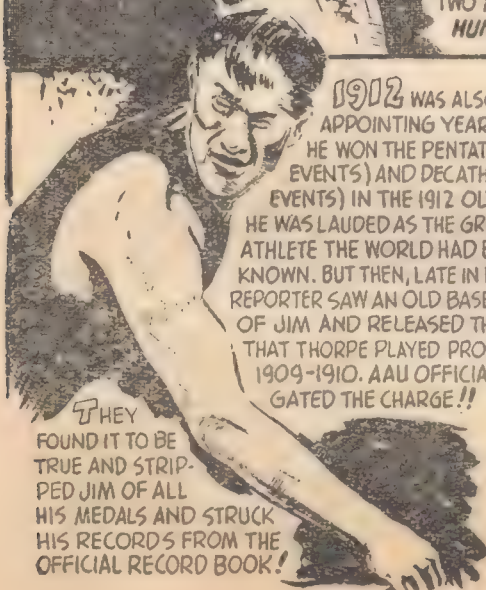


AFTER TWO YEARS IN NORTH CAROLINA SEMI-PRO BASEBALL, JIM RETURNED TO CARLISLE IN TIME FOR THE FOOTBALL SEASON.

CARLISLE WON 11 GAMES AND LOST 1! IN THE HARVARD GAME (18-15), JIM GAINED 173 OF THE 334 YARDS GAINED BY CARLISLE AND SCORED 12 OF THEIR 18 POINTS. THIS TIME HE MADE CAMP'S 1ST TEAM!

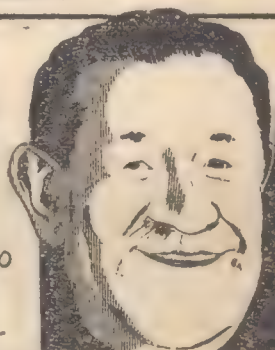


1912 WAS PROBABLY JIM'S GREATEST YEAR. HE AGAIN MADE CAMP'S ALL-AMERICA. IN THE GAME AGAINST ARMY (27-6), JIM TOOK AN ARMY PUNT ON HIS **OWN GOAL LINE** AND RAN FOR A TOUCHDOWN, BUT THERE WAS AN OFFSIDE ON THE PLAY AND ARMY KICKED OVER. JIM ONCE AGAIN TOOK IT ON HIS GOAL LINE AND AGAIN RAN FOR A TOUCHDOWN. IN LESS THAN TWO MINUTES, THORPE HAD RUN OVER **TWO-HUNDRED YARDS!!**



1912 WAS ALSO A DISAPPOINTING YEAR FOR JIM. HE WON THE PENTATHLON (FIVE EVENTS) AND DECATHLON (TEN EVENTS) IN THE 1912 OLYMPICS. HE WAS LAUDED AS THE GREATEST ATHLETE THE WORLD HAD EVER KNOWN. BUT THEN, LATE IN 1912, A REPORTER SAW AN OLD BASEBALL PHOTO OF JIM AND RELEASED THE STORY THAT THORPE PLAYED PRO BALL IN 1909-1910. AAU OFFICIALS INVESTIGATED THE CHARGE!!

THEY FOUND IT TO BE TRUE AND STRIPPED JIM OF ALL HIS MEDALS AND STRUCK HIS RECORDS FROM THE OFFICIAL RECORD BOOK!



ACCORDING TO POP WARNER, JIM DID NOTHING WRONG, FOR JIM THORPE LOVED TO PLAY THE GAME NOT FOR WHAT HE COULD GET OUT OF IT MATERIALLY BUT FOR THE SHEER THRILL. THORPE IS AN EXAMPLE FOR THE YOUTHS OF AMERICA TO FOLLOW...NO PURER AMATEUR EVER LIVED!!

SPORTS THROBS

by Gerard
Garrett



SIZZLING SPRINTERS!



If you had been in Palmer Stadium, at Princeton, about a year ago; you would have had the privilege of witnessing the famous old track meet between an Oxford-Cambridge team and a squad of cinder stars from Princeton and Cornell.

And there you would have seen the lion of the hour, a tall, lean Englishman named Roger Bannister. Experts watched him in action and immediately began comparing him with a little New Zealander named Jack Lovelock, who had set a record for the mile in 1933, in the same meet.

There were other similarities. Both never ran faster than it was necessary for them to win. But that was as far as the parallel could be drawn when the meet got started at Palmer Stadium on a warm day a few months ago.

And as Roger Bannister warmed up for a mile, he too must have been thinking of the great Jack Lovelock. There had been no great hopes for him that day, just as there were none for Bannister now. Lovelock had appeared on the field wearing a floppy straw hat and acting as casually as if he were on his way for a spot of tea and crumpets.

He was almost unrecognized in all the fuss about a black-haired kid from Princeton who had gained a reputation as a sizzling sprinter. His name was Bill Bonthron. Untested in the mile, his rooters were claiming they'd be satisfied if he won by a slow time in the event.

Then the gun cracked, and they were off. Bill wasn't a very pretty runner, but he exuded power as he pounded along. Jack Lovelock had a dainty smoothness in his stride, and a feather-footed glide that hardly disturbed the cinders on the track.

They were marked contrasts as they fled along at a blistering pace. The spectators gasped in disbelief at the speed in which they entered the last quarter. Bonthron was in the lead, running the fastest mile he had ever run. Then they were in the final lap. Bonthron began to apply the pressure. He lengthened his stride.

Jack Lovelock, the little fellow from Oxford, merely pattered along behind him, completely unconcerned. Then they reached the final turn, and Lovelock began to draw up slowly on Bonthron. Suddenly he was off like a man shot from a catapult. Into the home stretch he moved, at Bonthron's shoulder, and hung there for five strides. Then he was alone in solitary majesty.

The race was over. Bill Bonthron had set a new world's record of 4:08.7, but he was only runner-up with it. The little New Zealander had done the mile in 4:07.6, the fastest mile a man had ever run.

It was a preview of what Lovelock was to do in the Olympics three years later. This time the challenger was a seemingly invincible Kansan named Glen Cunningham. Lovelock beat Cunningham in the Olympics, setting a new world's record for the metric mile. His name was to occupy a glorious page in track history from then on.

As we started to tell you, Roger Bannister was thinking all these things as he waited for the mile race to be announced at Princeton. And then he was off, following in Jack Lovelock's footsteps. And, like Lovelock, he won, beating the best tracksters the Americans had to offer.

The parallel has now been extended a lot further. There is one more step to go... the 1952 Olympics. Since Lovelock won the mile in that too, it's now Roger Bannister's goal. He thinks he'll make it. The fate that carried the parallel of two British medical students this far, can't be stopped now!

THE FIGHTER WHO KAYOED A PITCHER—



WITHOUT HITTING HIM



Every sports fan knows the story of Jim Corbett... Gentleman Jim, the bank clerk turned fighter who had a long and glorious career as the heavyweight champion, the man known in Boxing history as the conqueror of the great John L. Sullivan.

But there is probably no sports fan around today who remembers his brother Joe, and there's very little reason why anyone should. He never achieved fame in the sports world, even though he tried pretty hard—at first.

Gentleman Jim Corbett had sought gold and glory in the prize ring. But his younger brother Joe decided on a career in baseball. Their paths parted, but they were good friends just the same. Joe was fiercely proud of his brother's ring record, and wasn't above tossing a few punches at anyone who made light of it.

Joe's diamond efforts attracted major league scouts to San Francisco. In 1896, he was given a trial with the old Baltimore Orioles, which was then a National League club. He caught on quickly. It may be, however, that Joe wasn't quite ready for the National League, because, in 1903, he was shipped to Los Angeles of the Pacific Coast League.

Joe really found himself there. He won 25 games that season, hurling the Angels into the Coast League championship. Reports on his fine pitching went east again, and he was called up by the St. Louis Cardinals. They wanted a World Series team to go with the World's Fair that year. With that great St. Louis team, young Joe Corbett was on his way to achieving baseball immortality.

He won several games, and then came up against the New York Giants for the first time. John McGraw was running the Giants then, and he was a great fight fan. By that time, Gentleman Jim had lost his title to Bob Fitzsimmons, and had been knocked out by Jim Jeffries when he had tried a comeback.

Jim got into a tight spot in his first game against the Giants. He might have worked himself out of the hole, but, in the midst of his predicament, there came a loud booming voice from the Giant dugout—the rasping taunting voice of John McGraw.

"Hey, Joe," he yelled. "Remember what Fitzsimmons and Jeffries did to your brother?"

Joe couldn't stand to hear anyone making fun of Jim. He lost his temper—and his control. He blew higher than a kite. Joe was knocked out of the box that day. Word soon got around that the Cardinal hurler would blow up as soon as anyone made fun of Jim's ring defeats.

The baseball crowd soon picked up the chant. Everywhere Joe pitched, he was kidded about Gentleman Jim. That's the way it was all around the league. Nobody reminded Joe about his brother winning the title from John L. Sullivan. It always was about losing to Fitzsimmon and getting knocked out by Jefferies. The last hurt, because Jim almost won back the championship in his second fight with the Boilermaker.

Joe Corbett, on his way to a great baseball career, couldn't take the ribbing. He turned in his suit and never pitched another big league ball game. That's why we say there's little reason to remember Joe Corbett. He never got very far in the sports world.

Ironically enough, Gentleman Jim Corbett's defeats in the ring kayoed his brother from baseball, keeping Jim from the fame that might have been his as a great pitcher!



WRESTLERS AREN'T SO DUMB!



When you see the letters "Ph.D." after a wrestler's name, you might be inclined to interpret them as standing for "Phony Dumbell," but listen to this tale of a group of wrestlers who gathered at a dinner in New York recently—there was no conflict of brawn versus brain there—they were both in the same people.

The affair was the annual sports dinner of the College of the City of New York—an intellectual outfit, indeed, and it was in honor of City College wrestlers, a group usually without honor or intellect any place.

Heading the list was Henry Wittenberg, an unusual character. He holds a B.S. degree from City College and an M.A. from Columbia. He taught school before joining the New York City Police Force. Wittenberg has won seven national A.A.U. senior wrestling championships, which is record in itself, and is undefeated in over 350 bouts. He won the Olympic light heavyweight title in London. He is the most famous amateur wrestler in the world.

Next to Wittenberg, the school is proudest of Jacob Twersky. He was captain of the team won the Metropolitan A.A.U. senior championship, and went to the finals of the NCAA tournament. A big tough guy is Twersky. He also happens to have a B.A., M.A., and Ph.D., and teaches history at City College. One other thing about Twersky. He was blind since the age of eight!

Bob Levin, another "intellectual wrestler" was captain of the college's mat team before Twersky. He is a writer, and lectures on the short story in the English Department.

There were seven other former wrestlers at the dinner who had been on the team with Wittenberg in 1937. Did they become plug-uglies with cauliflower ears and dyed hair? Well, there's Ralph Hirschrift, a professor of economics Charles Wilford, who collected M.A. and B.S. degrees; Ed Robbins, now an M.D.; Ben Taublieb, a C.P.A.; Allen Scherer, a public school teacher; Abe Ammer, an engineer, and Miles Siegel, a C.P.A.

That makes a total of twenty college degrees among ten wrestlers at the dinner, and if Gorgeous George had shown up, he'd have been thrown out on his ear!

Wittenberg's story is the most interesting. As a 135-pound freshman, he went out for the swimming team. He didn't do very well, until he met Joe Sapora, coach of the wrestling team. Sapora advised him that if he took up wrestling, it would improve his swimming. Wittenberg went out for the wrestling team, and within a year had gained 50 pounds, and shown great promise. He gave up swimming in favor of the mat sport, and went on to international fame.

Hank Wittenberg has one regret today, but he doesn't talk about it much. He went out for one team at City College that he never made. It was the chess team.

But the athletes of the black and red checked board were too much for Henry. He gave up in despair—and went out for swimming—the sport that was to make him a wrestler!

As for coach Joe Sapura, the quiet little man who turned out all these famous wrestlers who are just as proud of their college degrees...well, he never went to college!



BIG-LEAGUER — BIG STAR!



The start of the baseball season is a good time to tell this strange story—the story of two young rookies who were failures, but managed to turn their failures into success. It sounds a bit confusing, but it happened like this:

Years ago, a boy from Kansas City was given a try-out with the Boston Red Sox. He was a homely, happy kid with a gift for jokes and clowning. But he wanted to be a major league ball player more than anything else in the world.

That season, there was another youngster working out with the Red Sox. He had been a diamond star at Holy Cross, but somehow things didn't break right for the ex-collegian. He worked hard, and took the game very seriously, but he was a failure.

Meanwhile, the kid from Kansas City was having the time of his life practicing with the Red Sox. He was the life of the party—laughing, kidding, clowning in the outfield or when he was taking a cut at the plate. Sometimes, when he would notice the college kid sitting gloomily on the bench, he'd say, "Cheer up, kid, your day will come. We can't all be big-leaguers!"

Soon after, the college boy decided that the best thing he could do was give up, and quit baseball altogether. He put on his uniform one afternoon for what he decided would be the last time, and walked out on the field. Things didn't go any better. He tried hard, worked hard, but he just wasn't good enough.

Disappointed and discouraged, he sat down for a while on the bench. And as he sat there, he watched the kid from Kansas City working out at batting practice with four other members of the Red Sox. He saw now how clumsy that kid went after the ball, how awkwardly he moved around. He turned to a veteran sitting next to him and asked who the fellow was.

The veteran grinned and replied: "That kid's going places. The boys really think he's going to be a big-leaguer!"

Amazed, the college kid angrily exploded. "If that guy's a big-leaguer, so am I! At least I'm a better ballplayer than he is."

Right then and there, he decided he was going to stick it out. If that clown could be a big-leaguer, he could be one too. And that college kid, true to his word, stuck to it. From that workout, he moved along to become, in time, one of the greatest third basemen in the game. His name was Harold "Pie" Traynor.

And who was that bush leaguer from Kansas City whose clumsy ballplaying infuriated Traynor enough to make him stick to baseball? "Pie" had called the turn on that lad. He never did become a big-leaguer. He was a failure. In his failure was the cornerstone of his success—because he became the world famous comedian—Joe B. Brown!



BASEBALL'S IMMORTAL ATHLETE



Remember Hack Wilson? The National League has yet to produce another home run slugger who could produce his total of 56 in one season. And yet, ironically enough, the big brass of baseball can't raise enough to put up a simple little monument over his grave.

It reminds us of another great baseball player who died under the same circumstances. He was a full-blooded Indian named Sockalexis, a Penobscot, brought up on the reservation in Oldtown, Maine.

In the last decade of the 19th Century, several eastern college baseball players playing summer ball up there saw him in action. His running, hitting, and throwing made their eyes pop out. Sock, as he came to be called, was a shoo under six feet tall and built like a race horse. He could run a hundred yards in 19 seconds flat. He threw a baseball 408 feet in a line. He had an easy, graceful batting style.

The manager of the team of college stars recognized a great ball player when he saw one, and he was anxious to grab Sockalexis for his Alma Mater. Sock's father was a chief, and the manager visited him, and impressed upon him the need for a chief's son to have a college education.

Sockalexis was enrolled at Holy Cross. He played his first college game on Patriot's Day, April 19th, against Brown. He stole six bases and made four hits, one of them a home run that cleared the fence and broke a window in the chapel.

After a spectacular college career, Sockalexis joined Cleveland. He created a sensation, it would have resulted in a million dollars worth of gate receipts if he had made his first appearance under modern conditions.

The New York sports writers played up Sockalexis heavily. In those days, Amos Rusie, one of the best pitchers in the game, was the star of the Giants. He boasted that he would make short work of the Indian. He fed Sock his best pitch, a blazing curve, faster than most pitchers' fast ball. Sock slammed it out of the Polo Grounds for a home run.

The bright lights eventually got old Sock, and he slipped back to the minors. He wound up back on his reservation in Maine, where he died not long afterward, and was buried in an unmarked grave in the reservation cemetery. Years later, Holy Cross and Cleveland got together and paid him some minor honors.

Yes, Sockalexis' short, blazing career ended up full of ironies. The world's championship Cleveland Indians were named after him, for one thing. Amos Rusie, his great rival, finished his career as a night watchman at the Polo Grounds.

And remember that manager who got him into college? Well, he became a famous writer under the pen name of Burt L. Standish, and created the immortal Frank Merriwell books... Yes, Frank Merriwell, the idol of every American boy, and modeled after an Indian named Sockalexis, who died in obscurity, and was buried in an unmarked grave on his reservation.

★ ★ THIS ONE'S FOR THE BIRDS! ★ ★

Did you ever hear how some scraps of paper and a flock of pigeons won a pennant and a World Series? It's hard to believe, unless you know baseball players and managers, and how they are slaves to superstition.

The most superstitious of the lot, back in 1914, was George Stallings, manager of the Boston Braves. Stallings had all the old superstitions and a lot of new ones he had made up all by himself.

If a player hadn't shaved on the day the Braves won, he didn't shave again until the team lost. If he wore a certain necktie that day, he wore it every day. If he went to the ball park along a certain street, he had to go that way every day. It made life a bit difficult for the club, but Stallings insisted on it, and Stallings had a very bad temper.

He screamed and raged like a madman, and drove his players furiously. Players on other clubs thanked their stars that they didn't serve under Stallings. One player went even further. He loved to enrage Stallings by taking advantage of his superstitions.

He was Heinie Zimmerman, zany third baseman for the Chicago Cubs. The Cubs were the league leaders that season, and the Braves were in last place. So Heinie took great pleasure in baiting the lowly bean eaters.

Stallings saw evil signs in bits of paper on the ground in front of the dugout, and the sight of pigeons gave him the horrors, for they could only mean stark disaster. Zimmerman found out about this.

One day, Heinie nonchalantly walked past the Boston dugout, tore a scorecard to pieces, and threw the scraps on the ground in front of Stallings. Stallings screamed in agony. Moaning and cursing, he picked them all up, while his players looked on, not daring to laugh.

But Heinie wasn't through with Stallings. When the game started, a tremendous flock of pigeons descended on the dugout and the ground in front of it. Stallings shooed them away, but they kept returning. Stallings was nearly driven out of his mind.

Later he found out that Heinie had bought tickets behind the dugout for some kids, given them bags of popcorn, and told them to keep throwing the stuff in front of the dugout all through the game. Boston lost.

After the game, Stallings tore into the clubhouse in a blind rage. It was the 14th of July, and the Braves were in last place. "This is the worst ball club I ever saw!" Stallings yelled. "But pigeons or no pigeons, paper or no paper, I'll get you out of last place if I have to break your necks!"

From then on, he drove them mercilessly. But a miracle took place. In the last half of the season, the Braves won 51 games and lost only 16. They clinched the pennant, and then turned on the Philadelphia Athletics, who were highly favored to win the World Series. The Braves won in four straight games.

George Stallings became known as the Miracle Man. He had accomplished the impossible. He had lashed a cellar club to baseball glory. But only Heinie Zimmerman knew how it had been done, and he regreted it...because his own team, the Cubs, had the pennant snatched from it by Stallings on the last day of the season...and Heinie knew further that the Braves had risen to fame that season because of... some scraps of paper and a flock of pigeons...!

TURNING BACK *the* SPORTS PAGE

THE FAMOUS DOUBLE KNOCKOUT—AD WOLGAST VS. JOE RIVERS—VERNON, CALIFORNIA

EVERY VISITING DAY AT A WELL-KNOWN SANATORIUM, A MAN VISITS HIS FRIEND. HE GREETES HIM WITH "HOW ARE YOU, KID?"—BUT NEVER RECEIVES AN ANSWER, FOR THE INTERNEE RECOGNIZES NO ONE...YET, ON JULY 4, 1912, THESE TWO MEN ENTERED THE RING TO BATTLE FOR THE LIGHTWEIGHT CHAMPIONSHIP OF THE WORLD.....



AD WOLGAST WAS THE LIGHTWEIGHT CHAMPION AND HIS OPPONENT, JOE RIVERS, WAS ONE OF THE TOP LIGHTWEIGHTS IN THE GAME. JACK WELSH WAS THE REFEREE AND ACCORDING TO THE CUSTOM OF THE DAY, THE CHAMPION'S CORNER HAD THE AUTHORITY TO HIRE THE REFEREE!

ROUND ONE!!



THE BELL RANG AND BOTH GLADIATORS RUSHED OUT AND SLUGGED TOE TO TOE. THE CROWD ROARED ITS APPROVAL AS THE CHALLENGER BELTED THE FAVORED CHAMPION AND AS THE SEVENTH ROUND DREW TO A CLOSE, THE PINT-SIZED RIVERS WAS AHEAD ON POINTS!!



THE NEXT FIVE ROUNDS WERE JUST AS BRUTAL AS THE FIRST 7 AND ALTHOUGH BOTH BOYS ABSORBED A GREAT DEAL OF PUNISHMENT, NEITHER ONE WENT DOWN! AS THE 12TH ROUND ENDED A MAJOR UPSET WAS IN SIGHT WITH RIVERS FAR OUT IN FRONT!!

THE DOUBLE KNOCKOUT!!



THE FIGHTERS LUNGED AT EACH OTHER, AS THE 13TH ROUND OPENED, AND SLUGGED AWAY FURIOUSLY. THEN RIVERS LASHED OUT A MURDEROUS RIGHT THAT SHOOK WOLGAST. AS RIVERS RUSHED IN FOR THE KILL, THE CHAMP UNLEASHED A LEFT HOOK WHICH LANDED SIMULTANEOUSLY WITH ANOTHER RIVERS BLOW. BOTH MEN WENT DOWN!!

REFEREE JACK WELSH WAS MOMENTARILY CONFUSED, BUT THEN RACED TO THE FALLEN BATTlers AND RAISED THE CHAMP, HOLDING HIM UNDER HIS ARMS AND AT THE SAME TIME, COUNTED OUT JOE RIVERS. WOLGAST WAS CARRIED TO HIS CORNER AND THE FIGHT WAS OVER. WELSH INSISTED THAT WOLGAST WAS FOULED...NO ONE SAW THE FOUL, HOWEVER!



A FEW YEARS LATER, ONE OF THE BATTlers RETIRED TO A REST HOME AND THE OTHER GLADIATOR VISITED HIM FAITHFULLY EVER SINCE. AND ON EVERY VISITING DAY, AD WOLGAST, THE CHAMPION, LOOKS UP AT JOE RIVERS, THE CHALLENGER, WITH NON-RECOGNITION IN HIS EYES EVERY TIME THE LITTLE MEXICAN SAYS, "HOW ARE YOU, KID?"

WHERE THERE'S SMOKEY,



Pitch after pitch, the ball behaved like a thing with a will of its own!

THERE'S A FIREBALL by MARTIN S. MADANCY

The ball would come hurtling at the batter's head, the batter would dive for his life, the ball would then peel off and in across the plate. Not sometimes. Every time.

Every time Smokey wanted it to

THE SPORTS writers have long ago exhausted their wits on the enigmatic rise of old Smokey Sears, once the feeblest of the Pittsburgh Robins' relief pitchers. Smokey, they call him, because he has the fastest pitch in the National League. Two years ago they called him the burnt out fireman, but no one remembers that now.

Yes, it was two years ago, about

three weeks before the end of the season, and the Robins were clinching their usual eighth place. Suddenly old Smokey Sears began to sport an outside curve that nearly turned a corner. It was too late to hoist the Robins out of the cellar, but that year the managment, generally as free with cash as a kiltie band, emptied its purse into the palm of Lefty O'Tool of the Coast

League for a hot young southpaw who had been burning up the west coast. The next year the kid from the coast and Smokey snuffed away forty-four games between them, and there were still five games to go. The Robins had an excellent chance for their first pennant in twenty-two years.

The only rub was that no one knew from what occult source Smokey's erstwhile mediocre arm was conjuring its extra powers. It had not been a bad arm for relief, but after four innings, five at the most, it was dead. It had never started more than twelve games in its ten years of major league baseball, and with any team but the Robins, it would probably have sunk into the minors long before. Smokey was now the talk of the league, however, and the editor of my sheet figured there was a hot story somewhere under the Pittsburgh sport headlines. He sent me down to find just what it was that kindled old Smokey's fireball.

It was not difficult to arrange the interview with Smokey, and I was glad to see that he wasn't reeling with success. He knew me from years before, and I saw that he was sincerely glad to see me again. He wasn't called Smokey for his blazing wit, and I knew that every expression that wreathed his face was genuine.

In past years, whenever news in the National League lagged a bit, the scribes had a habit of plucking out Smokey and dragging him over the coals as an example of the evils of a fixed minimum salary. I never did because I don't like to kick an underdog, especially when he hurls all he has into every pitch, as I knew Smokey did. When he saw me, he wrung my hand until it ached and pulled me into his room.

IT WAS A little larger than the average ball player's hotel room, and there was space for twin beds and two big armchairs. In the farthest corner, almost hidden in one of the armchairs, I saw a young boy with heavy horn-rimmed eyeglasses.

He held in his arms a huge, moldy tome, over which his pinched-up nose closely glided.

"Orville!" Smokey called.

The kid heaved a sigh and slammed his book. A small cloud of dust mushroomed over his head. He got up and walked over, and his little face squinted as he eyed me. He looked like a rookie hurler walking to the mound to face Musial and loaded bases.

"Casey, meet Orville, my nephew," Smokey said. "Orville is a Princeton man," he added.

I looked at Smokey for a moment, and then I laughed. I laughed long and very loud, and I hoped I sounded sincere. It is hard to tell when some of these ball players joke, and I wanted Smokey to realize that his humor was not wasted. Then I caught the look on the kid's face, and I cut my laugh. Although he could not have been more than twelve years old, the way his face flushed and his eyebrows stuck out would have chilled an umpire's heart.

"I am familiar with the calumniating yellow school of journalism your tabloid represents," the lad muttered in a quivering voice, "and I am not surprised at the puerile buffoonery of its staff! Uncle Walter," he said to Smokey, "you will find me in the lobby when this—this person leaves!"

He hoisted his volume under his arm, aimed a scorching glance at me, and trotted primly out of the room. Fortunately, I was determined to be pleasant. Besides, I could tell by Smokey's stammering apologies and unhappy confusion that the poor fellow was stung as sharply as I.

"Let us sit down and have our chat, Uncle Walter," I cheerily said, hoping to sweep aside the crumbs of gloom the young professor had left behind. I knew that Smokey had already been unsuccessfully pumped by every sports writer in Pittsburgh, and half a hundred others, but I thought he might drop a few clues—hints that I could follow up. I started in with the big question, hoping to catch him napping off the bag,

but he drew himself in more than ever.

"Honest, Casey," he said with the look of a well fed cat, "there's nothing new. Nothing you don't already know."

"How about that little dame from Idaho you were going with?" I insisted. "'Bout time for wedding bells isn't it?"

The boob reddened and looked down at his slippered feet. I thought that maybe, finally, I was finding the groove.

"Well, I won't hold out on you, Casey," he finally admitted. "We had a little tiff...nothing really serious...just a small misunderstanding. You understand."

"Sure, sure," I cooed, and I figured that I had struck my first break. Maybe the girl really knew something. Maybe now that the romance was a bit bumpy, she would get conservative. Maybe she even knew what it was that put the extra kink in Smokey's screw-ball, and gave the tantalizing new hang to his floater. I couldn't wait to see her, and I hurriedly thanked Smokey and aimed for the door.

There was a solid thump of a stockinged foot bounding by me, however, and Smokey was suddenly before me with his back against the door.

"You wouldn't think of printing anything about me and Mabel, would you, Casey?" he smiled, but the smile was tight, and the perspiration stood out on his upper lip.

I STOOD back to better my view of the six-foot-three pile of sinkers and hooks. His damp and heaving shoulders seemed about to burst out of his shirt. I assured him on powerful vows that I never had the vaguest notion of printing such slander.

"I hope you didn't let Orville touch you off," he worried. "He's like that to everybody. Honest!"

"Thanks," I said.

"No, honest, Casey. He told Rebeck of the Gazette that if the club had a buck for every lie they print-

ed about us, we could buy a good center fielder."

"Ingenious."

"He told McGinnis that he covered short like a bow-legged Venus de Milo."

"The kid has talent," I admitted, "but McGinnis took this?"

"By the time the old man explained that Venus de Milo's arms were busted, Orville was gone."

I finally succeeded in assuring Smokey that Orville was not the first wobbly, double-edged tongue I had encountered in my cons of baseball reporting, and that a thick skin was as essential to my business as was a chest protector to a catcher. And now would he let me by?

Reluctantly, he opened the door, and as he gazed after me, I had the feeling that his eyes were pulling me back by the tail of my coat. I hurried to the elevator and pushed the button. That night, I dreamed of thousands of fiery, smoking baseballs.

The girl lived on the other side of town in a small, neat apartment, and she was a trim little thing herself. I could tell from the start that Smokey was still first in her heart, and I thought I would have more trouble. The moment I mentioned the wedding, however, I saw that I hit the responsive chord. I just sat back and listened.

Orville, Mabel insisted, has come between Smokey and her. Smokey was stuck with the kid when his father, a government employee, was suddenly assigned for a two-year hitch in the American embassy at Paris. Instead of Smokey caring for the kid, however, it seems that Orville had somehow taken Smokey under his wing. The kid had a larger vocabulary when he was six years old, Mabel said, than Smokey has now, and from the small dose that I already had of Orville, I knew she was right. The kid was setting himself up as Smokey's manager, and the funny thing was that everything he said was Hoyle to Smokey. No drinks, no smokes, regular hours, Orville insisted, and no women. The last item was the rub for the green-

eyed, carrot-topped damsel before me. She paused for a few soft dabs at the eyes with her handkerchief.

"But," I objected, "I don't see where that would make much difference. Even before Orville arrived, Smokey was never what a person could call a loose liver."

"I know whose liver I'd like to loosen," she gently sobbed.

"They must be trying to hide something," I said.

"...Trying to hide my Smokey," the girl muttered.

Seeing that the field before me was exhausted, I murmured condolences, picked up my hat, and left. I knew Smokey was slated for the mound that day, and I wanted to speak to him, but I wanted to see him pitch first. I had already watched him pitch a shutout at New York at the beginning of the season, but the scribes all said he was getting hotter every day. He had a couple of two-hitters in the past two weeks, and all the league was waiting for his first no hitter. Besides, if Smokey won this game, the Robins had the National League pennant clinched.

IT WAS A week day, but the stands were crowded to capacity an hour before game time. The radio men were adjusting their equipment, and the press men were drifting in by two's and three's into their glass enclosed booths. The warming up period was almost over, and the caretakers dragged the screen backstop to the bull pen in left center field. A dull roar started from the crowd as the Robins trotted out to their positions and Smokey walked to the mound. The constant, simmering buzz from the crowd died out into complete silence when the umpire gave the order to play ball. Even I felt the tightness of the air, though baseball had long been but a routine chore to me. I loosened my tie and breathed deeper. The lead-off man stepped into the batter's box.

Smokey's wind-up was unorthodox, almost fantastic, and small exclamations sprinkled from places in the

stands, from people who had not seen him pitch that year. He bent over in a languid bow until his glove brushed the top of his shoes. Straightening, he lifted his arm back, then brought it forward once more and let the ball go without ever completely straightening his arm.

It seemed impossible that he could generate that power with a bent arm, and I felt a tingle through my scalp as I watched that first pitch. It was low and fast, and it looked bad from the moment it left Smokey's hand.

The umpire readied his left arm to jut out, and then the ball, in one small, whirring, snapping arc, cut up and in, unmistakably cutting a piece of the lower left corner of the strike zone. "Ste-e-erike!" the umpire roared, then asked the catcher to hand him the ball. He examined it, and tossed a new ball back to Smokey. The rising purr that had started from the crowd died into silence once more.

Pitch after pitch, inning after inning, and the ball behaved like a thing with a will of its own. It was as if Smokey were hurling the ball down an invisible alley hanging in mid-air. A batter would suddenly throw himself in the dust as he saw the ball come hurtling at his head, but the ball would then peel off and in with a sizzling flip and disappear in the catcher's glove. A strained titter would fall from the crowd, and the batter would always get up with blazing eyes, pound the dust from his uniform, and step back into the box, where he would glare viciously at Smokey. But he would always be back an inch or two from where he stood before. The next pitch would cut an outside corner for another strike.

In the sixth inning, Bailey led off with a walk for the Robins, and promptly stole second. There was a short and savage argument on the play, but the umpire's hands had flattened, and everyone knew they would not change. McGinnis smacked a little single over second, and Bailey came home in a billow of dust. The

inning ended with McGinnis marooned on first, but the Robins had a run, and it looked as if they would not need another.

The score was still one to nothing when Allan, the opposing clean-up man, appeared again in the first half of the eighth inning. The glimmering in his eyes was not lovelight. Smokey leaned over, touched the rosin bag, and twisted into his insane wind-up once more. Once more the ball came hurtling at Allan's load as it had done once before, and once more Allan flopped in the dust with his bat stretched out and up before him. But this time the ball hit the bat and bounded through the infield, just beyond Smokey's reach and past second base. Allan picked himself together and raced for first.

THE REST of the game continued as it had started. Allan died on first base, and the ball never left the infield again. The game was a classic exhibition of pitching, and the Pittsburgh scribes all agreed that it was nothing but meanness on Allan's part to get up and run and ruin Smokey's no-hitter. As the crowd milled out of the gate, I thought I caught a glimpse of Orville, but he disappeared again. I went back to the hotel, where I wanted to wait for Smokey, but the lobby was filled with fans and autograph hunters, so I went to my room and waited for the next day.

I knew what I was going to do. Something had certainly possessed, almost bewitched, Smokey's arm. I knew Smokey would never let me in on the voodoo of his own volition, so I decided to bluff. I knew that Orville was somehow stirring the entire brew.

I had no trouble seeing Smokey the next day. Orville was away with a new friend, a professor of physics at the University of Pittsburgh, and I had Smokey all to myself.

"How about yesterday's game?" I asked. "I guess you feel pretty rotten at missing out on a no-hitter like that."

"Oh, no, Casey," he complacently objected. "There'll be other chances

now that we're getting into the series."

"Yes," I replied, "that's what Orville said too."

"Orville?"

"Yes," I lied, "I met him at the game, and we got to talking—peacefully. He said he was worried about what you were going to do when he has to leave you."

"Oh, that don't make any difference now," Smokey laughed. "I got every ball memorized."

"Then the kid has been giving you pitching lessons!" I gaped, and then I shut my big mouth with a snap, but it was too late. He'd fallen for the gag like an innocent child, but I ruined it. I ruined it and I knew it. I got up and flew for the door, but he nailed me with a flying tackle.

Just then the door opened of its own accord. It was Orville, and I saw that he understood everything with the first glance. He turned, gave the key a twist, and took it out and dropped it into his pocket. We watched him as if we were in a trance. He went over to the chair on the other side of the room, where he dropped his book and picked up a baseball bat. I felt my blood grow sluggish in my veins.

"No, Orville," Smokey said. "No murder."

"No murder, Uncle Walter," Orville agreed. "I merely want to stand by the door here to discourage any ardent aspirations Mr. Casey might feel for fresh air."

GRADUALLY, Smokey peeled himself from my back. He straightened and brushed his hair to one side.

"He lied to me, Orville," he breathed. "He told me you let him in on your pitching lessons."

"I gathered that," Orville mused. "I perceived from the start that this one had a bit more of a brain than the rest. I should have known better than to let you alone."

Strengthened by this flattery, I groped to my feet. Orville poked me in the stomach with the bat, and I fell back into an armchair. There

wasn't much noise for a time. I was gasping, Orville was thinking, and Smokey just looked. Finally, as my breath came back and I realized that my captors' hearts were void of murder, I began to enjoy the situation, I had succeeded in cracking a plot that had every sportsman in the East baffled.

"Gentlemen," I said, "now that I know enough to be dangerous, how about spilling everything?"

"No!" Smokey pouted, and his face flushed. "You know too much now."

"It really doesn't make any difference, Uncle Walter," the genius said. "The fact is I'm rather proud of my accomplishment. You see, Mr. Casey, it is merely a matter of simplified physics."

"I just want a general outline," I modestly objected.

"My theory works on the principle of the Australian boomerang," the youngster continued. "If you have seen Uncle Walter pitch this year, you have no doubt noticed how his throwing arm is crooked into almost a ninety-degree angle, even at the time of the ball's release. That angle at the elbow is the cardinal point of every wind-up. I have worked out a formula in which there are only two variables for each different pitch. For instance, an outside curve has the greatest angle at the elbow, while a fast ball has the least."

"I think I understand," I said, "but you must realize that once this thing breaks into print—and you can't keep it covered forever—your pitch will be banned. It has to be! Either that, or a complete revolution of modern baseball. You must see, of course, that you are developing baseball into a science."

"No, that cannot be, Mr. Casey," Orville replied. "Haven't you wondered how Uncle Walter's arm has the power to throw the ball with such force with his arm still bent at a fairly large angle?"

"I have noticed it, now that you mention it, and it seemed almost impossible—as if he were locking the joints in his elbow," I said.

"That is just about it, Mr. Casey," Orville replied. "You see, in his youth, Uncle Walter once broke his arm. It was incorrectly set, and it was never bothered with after that. In time, the arm recovered all of its pristine strength."

Meanwhile, Smokey had taken his cue and had been rolling up his sleeve while we were talking.

"Lookit, Casey," he said, and he twisted his forearm so that a good piece of it protruded at the elbow.

"It's a rare condition," the young brain commented, "and I realized its possibilities immediately."

THE LAST part of Orville's speech had been punctuated by three distinct raps at the door. There was a moment of pregnant silence, and then the raps rung out again.

"Alright, Smokey, I know you're there!" a voice called out. "I heard ya!"

I recognized the voice of Billy Bloodworth, manager of the Robins. Smokey and Orville froze as stiff as the dead, but they were staring at me with bulging eyes. I took my cue.

"Just a minute Billy," I called, "Smokey's coming!"

Smokey looked as if he were going to take the bat from Orville and polish my brains, but Orville motioned for him to open the door. When Bloodworth walked in, his eyes were glaring and his cigar was tilted at a dangerous angle. I offered salutations, but he ignored me.

"I don't know what the devil you guys are up to," he shouted in the same voice he had used on the other side of the door, "but I don't want no horseplay at this stage of the game!"

"Nothing to get sore about, Billy," I murmured. "Just a little presseries interview."

"All right," he snapped, "now listen to me, Smokey. Your head's gettin' too big for your ears. Newport told me you shook off half his signals yesterday!"

"So what," Smokey frowned.

"What Newport knows about baseball, I could pound into the pocket of my glove."

"Yeah, I know," Billy roared, "but you nearly killed him yesterday!"

"Killed him!"

"Sure! The kid don't know what's comin' next! He signals for a knuckler, and then he sees the ball tearin' along the lower left-hand corner. Then, all of a sudden, it snaps up and clips him in the teeth!"

"Maybe we could devise a system by which Uncle Walter could signal the catcher," Orville offered.

"Listen, Junior," Billy mourned, "It took Uncle Walter two and a half years to get the signals we're usin' now stuffed into his ears." He turned to Smokey again. "That's all I wanted to say, Smokey, but I'm warnin' ya and don't forget it!"

"Wait a minute, Billy," I said. "I'll go with you."

As we walked to the door, Orville stepped before us.

"Mr. Bloodworth," he said, "What would you say if I told you that I am responsible for the recent brilliant pitching of Uncle Walter?"

I wondered what new and hidden gears were being brought into play in the freakish mind of the wizened bespectacled phenomenon that stood before us. My head felt bloated. Was he exposing the whole plot just to ruin my scoop? Or was he laying the entire responsibility on Bloodworth's shoulders, hoping that the old manager wouldn't take the chance of losing Smokey?

"I'd say you were nuts!" Bloodworth murmured.

That night I found myself in a bar in the lower part of town. I had been turning the whole wriggling mess over and over in my mind, and I twisted it into a dozen anomalous forms, but the answer always came out the same. What would my boss say if I turned in the facts just as they were? What would he say if I told him that old Smokey Sears, who signed his checks with X's, was pitching by formula? What would he say if I told him that a twelve-year-old kid was giving old Smokey Sears pitching lessons? I

ordered another beer. I knew what he would say. He would say what Billy Bloodworth said. He would say I was nuts! "You're slippin', Casey!" he would say. "You're nuts! This is pure fiction! You're crazy!"

I went back to my room and hauled out my portable. I slipped the paper in. "All right," I said, "so it's pure fiction!" Slowly, I began to peck out a sentence at the top of the page.

"The sports writers have long ago exhausted their wits on the enigmatic rise of old..."

PASS 'EM BLIND!

(Continued From Page 21)

goal line behind them with both hands raised into the air.

Fans poured onto the field. They tried to clear the field for the extra point, but nobody cared, including the two teams. Fans tore the shirts from the players in their joy.

Back on his own thirty yard line Jimmy lay on the ground as Cougar linemen slowly climbed off him. He knew his left leg would never hold him if he tried to get up, so he didn't try. He didn't know how the pass was going to come out and he didn't care. There was nothing he could do about it now. He just wanted to rest.

Then Dancer and the doctor and a ring of his teammates, protecting him from the enthusiastic, hysterical fans, were there. "Come on," Dancer said, helping him up on his good leg, "we've got to get that knee in shape."

"Get it in shape?" Jimmy asked. "What for? The season's over."

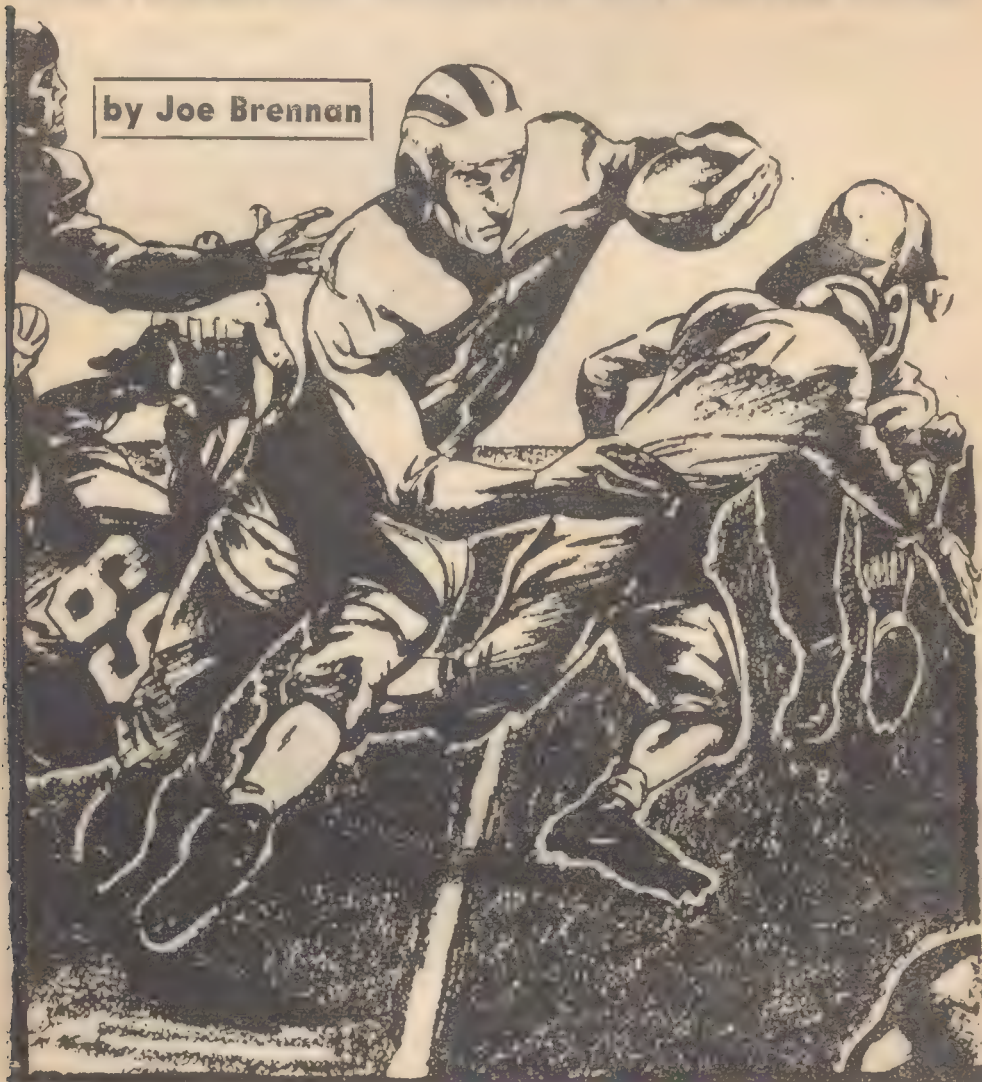
"Don't forget the Bowl games," Dancer said. "I didn't want to say anything before the game today, but the faculty's given us permission to go to a Bowl game if we get a bid. We'll get ten bids now."

Jimmy grinned and the fatigue ran out of him like water out of a funnel. Another football game! That was another story. Another chance to show what a dope McNeal had been, and another chance to show what a terrific weapon a good passing attack could be.

BIG-LEAGUE PIGSKINNER

PULSE-HAMMERING FEATURE-LENGTH PIGSKIN NOVEL!

by Joe Brennan



CHAPTER I

STANDING at the bench in his practice moleskins, Jimmy Travis felt small alongside these padded pro footballers. Reporting late to Coach Lou Strohm hadn't helped his confidence any, either. The coach's blue penetrating eyes now raked Jimmy's five-foot-eight

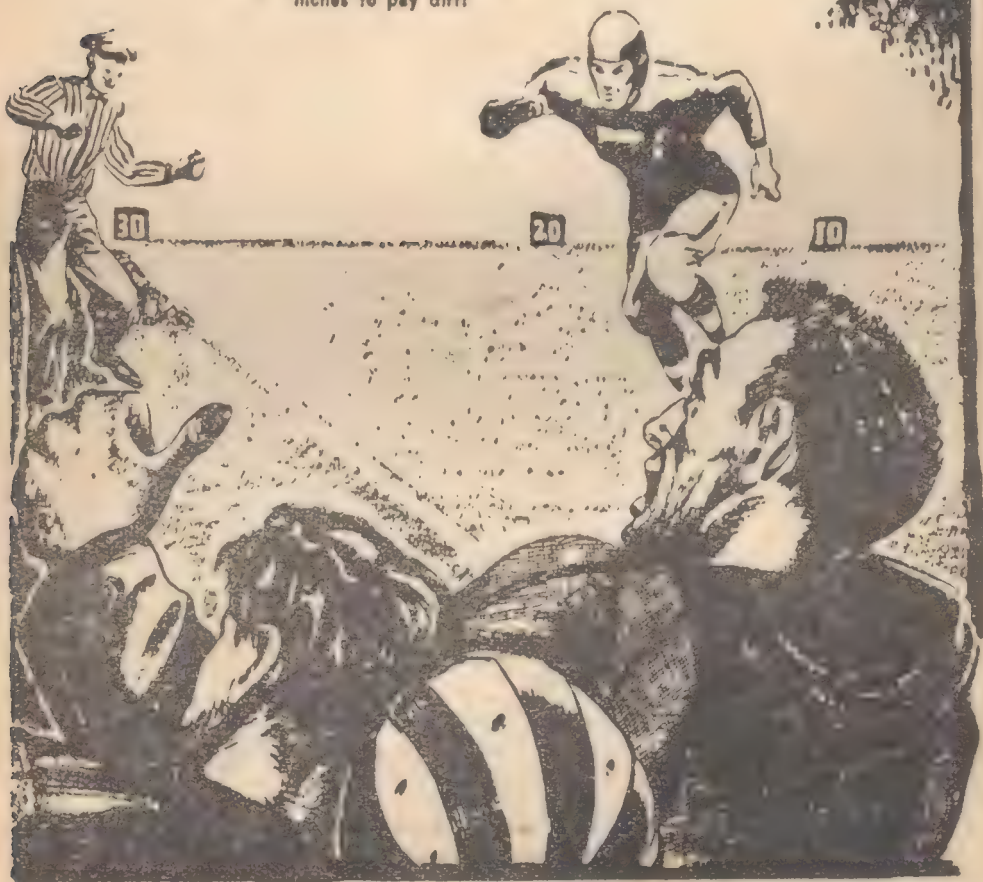
frame, and the latter squirmed a little inside.

"You ain't exactly what I was expectin'," said the graying Strohm. "This is big-time football you're tryin' to crash, an' you don't even come close to havin' the heft."

Jimmy swallowed, tried to look and act the confident, capable half-back he was supposed to be. "Close

WHEN GLORY PLAYER TURNS MONEY-PLAYER!

Jimmy bolted forward hip-swiveled, bucking and churning head-on the last few inches to pay dirt!



Sensational pass receiver, miracle placement kicker, wraith of a balltoter, the kid was the talk of the college football. But how could he prove it to his new pro boss against these hard bitten pigskin hellions—grid-toughened married men who fought not valiantly for the alma mater but fiercely, grimly, for groceries for the wife and kids!

counts only in horseshoes, Mr. Strohm," he said. "You wanted beef—or you wanted ability?" And the instant he'd said it, he was sorry. Trying to display confidence was one thing, but he knew now that this had sounded more like the jabber of a young wise guy.

"Whatta we got?" rasped one of the players on the bench. "A new mascot?"

Without turning his head, Coach Strohm warned the owner of the sandpaper voice, "Enough of that, Farbin. Give a rookie a break. He might be the very kid to get some of you men back into the spirit of the game."

The coach jerked his head and sidled away from the benched players, indicating that Jimmy should join him. Jimmy glanced at the red-headed Farbin, then followed the coach.

And now the football mentor was saying his piece. "Look, kid, here's the dope. As coach of this Card outfit, I've got to take what Owner Mills sends me. Okay, so he picked you up from a West Coast college an' wants to experiment with you..."

Jimmy shot a quick glance at the two practicing teams on the field. He was seeing blocking that had no fooling in it, tackles that could part you from your brains.

"Experiment?" Jimmy repeated. Then, trying to compliment the coach on his Card aggregation, added, "Your players sure look to me like they're doing their chores."

Strohm turned his bullet head in the direction of the field scrimmage. "Don't be fooled. They're only puttin' on an act now to intimidate you. Break your morale."

"Why should they do that, Coach?"

Strohm tapped Jimmy's chest lightly. "Young fella, you represent a menace to them. Their jobs are hangin' in the balance. If you show real stuff at your position, they know we'll be shovin' new young blood into some of the other spots."

Jimmy's eyes ranged over the pros on the field, then searched the men on the bench, and he began to com-

prehend their unfriendliness. These were not young collegians who played for the cheers of the girl friend with the pom pom in the bleachers. No, these were married men fighting for shoes and groceries for the wife and the kids.

Strohm suddenly blew a whistle on the two practicing teams, motioned for Jimmy and the benched men to follow him onto the field.

Along with the rest, Jimmy listened to the coach's instructions, watched him demonstrate rock-firm blocks, saw him execute handoffs that were smooth as silk. And all the time the unfriendliness was there in the group—unfriendliness for Jimmy Travis, the stranger. He felt it as keenly as if they were pushing tacks into him.

The next morning at practice it was the same thing. Only the felony was compounded when Jimmy was on the field for pass-receiving. The passers gave him nothing good, nothing easy. Most of their throws were a little beyond him. Not much—just enough to make him look slow in reaching the spot marked X. Occasionally, to make it look like he was over-running the ball, the passers made pitches a little behind him. Particularly did fullback Red Farbin work against him.

Jimmy sweated blood trying to show Coach Strohm and Owner Mills what it was that had made him the talk of Pacific Coast college football. Jimmy Travis—sensational pass receiver; miracle placement kicker; wraith of a ball totter; the picture player—every move a thing of beauty and grace. He thought about all these things the papers had been saying about him. And then the thought of being dropped from the line-up and returning to the Coast, gagged him right where he stood. Not in a whole lifetime would he be able to explain it away.

At the end of the workout, Strohm said in an aside, "They workin' with you, kid?"

Jimmy looked away, answered, "Doing the best they know how..." He didn't feel that he was lying, for his words could correctly be interpreted as "Doing the best they know

how to defeat me." No, he simply had no strain of alibiing in his system.

Hired strictly on a game-to-game trial basis, Jimmy plugged with the Cards all week in an effort to be ready for the big Sunday game. He looked sensational only when Coach Strohm was holding the ball for him during field-goal practice. Twenty-four out of twenty-five boots pinwheeled prettily between the uprigths.

CHAPTER II

BILLED AS the starting right half, Jimmy knew that a good portion of these packed stands were here to see how the highly heralded rookie would fit into the Card scheme of things. He also knew that the burden was on him to make good, and thus pave the way for more young rookies to make the big time.

The Card players continued to give him the chill; not a friendly word for him, not a smile. He looked up at the vast buzzing throng stacked high, and his stomach knotted, for he had always thought that hitting the big time would be different.

The Giants won the coin toss and elected to kick. Jimmy went to his halfback spot, hoping he wouldn't slop things up if the kick-off came to him. He knew what taut nerves could do.

The official's whistle started the Giants moving forward, and here was the ball floating high and lazily against a slate-gray sky. Sure enough, it was drifting directly to Jimmy as though the opposition meant to test the newcomer on the very first play.

Jimmy moved under it, saw it turn and twist in its descent. He took it in on the run, broke to his right to pick up some interference. Fortified with two blockers, he powered down the sideline, churning his knees high. One of his blockers slipped and went down in a sprawl. The other raced at Jimmy's left, warded off two would-be tacklers but was spilled by a third Giant who tried to get at the ball carrier.

Jimmy hip-swiveled quickly and deftly enough to make another Giant tackler ricochet off his thighs. But the impact made the ball jump from Jimmy's arm. Desperately, Jimmy grabbed at the loose leather, juggled it crazily as he continued on the move. And then he had it once more cuddled at his stomach.

Still pounding along the sideline stripe, he could hear and feel the roar of those frenzied fans. Was he giving them one of those rare touchdown runs on an opening kick-off? Momentarily, he was drunk with the thought of breaking into big time this way... Then he couldn't believe it was actually happening to him. Too good to be true; movie stuff!

But here the white markers were flying under his feet as he made great grabs for ground. And what was this? Yes, here were the diagonal stripes under him now—the end zone! Jimmy touched the ball to the sod, straightened up and tried to tell himself that none of it was a dream.

It took the sudden change in the pattern of the crowd-noise to tell him that the run was worthless. Rot-ten worthless! Panting with the noise of a pump, Jimmy looked back downfield, saw the official marking where a cleated shoe had stepped out of bounds at the time of the ball juggling act.

Someone nearby grated, "That the way a Joe College does it?"

JIMMY KNEW without looking up that it was the carrot-topped fullback, Farbin. He felt the eyes of his whole team on him. Eyes smouldering with resentment.

Walking leadenly back to his own forty-five yard line, Jimmy's desolation was complete when right half Duarte came galloping in to replace him.

"Coach wants an oldtimer to take over," the big veteran grinned. "One who don't step outta bounds."

Jimmy just held his lower lip between his teeth and loped off the field. At the bench, he walked up to Strohm, said, "Sorry I bobbled that ball and stepped out of bounds."

The coach never took his eyes off the field, just said dryly, "I just pulled you because you were winded. The run wasn't bad—even though it didn't count for a touchdown. I liked that change of pace you showed."

"Thanks," Jimmy said thinly, and took a spot in the bench-polisher's lineup. Secretly he felt he ought to be *under* the bench where he could hide from the eyes that had witnessed his first start in big time today.

He watched the two teams hammer up and down the field for a full quarter. He wondered why Strohm didn't use him. Not till the coach ambled his way and said out of the corner of his mouth, "Never saw my gang hit this way before," did Jimmy understand that his footballing wasn't needed at present. The impact of tackling Cards had that meaty sound of big men throwing themselves with reckless abandon at each other. Strohm added, "Looks like just having' you here on the bench as a threat to their jobs is enough..."

"That won't make a big league pigskinner out of me," said Jimmy.

Strohm pawed reflectively at his square chin. "'Course I can always shove you in there to scare them a little more an' keep them on their toes."

"What about the kicking department?" Jimmy reminded.

Strohm nodded, "Yup, there we need you. An' bad."

Jimmy watched the Giants rack up a touchdown on an intercepted pass, saw them make the conversion. When the big 7 went up on the scoreboard for the Giants, Strohm started walking the length of the bench like a man looking for his brains. He approached Jimmy, ready to use him. But, wait—the Cards were moving forward again with the ball!

Stocky Maas, the Card quarterback, engineered a seventy-yard sustained march downfield to a touchdown. Every inch of it on straight, smashing ground plays. The score stood at 7—6, favor the Giants. Twice

Strohm had sent in substitutes to order Maas to call for passes just for variety's sake. But not a pass had been called.

Sitting at Strohm's side, Jimmy muttered, "Funny way to run a railroad!"

"Yeah," Strohm said, "they're gettin' cocky in their plans to show they don't need either you or me." He signalled for a substitute quarterback to go in, then said to Jimmy, "Kid, go in with him an' do the bootin'."

Jimmy reported on field, took his spot.

ONCE AGAIN he had that dryness in his mouth as he waited for the ball to be snapped from center. Would he bungle this one? This jungle competition of the big leagues had him wound tight as a spring. And the silent treatment his team mates were giving him wasn't helping any. Signals. A snapped ball to Farbin who placed it in kicking position. As the Giants rushed, Jimmy took his step forward, drove at the placed ball with his right foot. In that split instant, he realized that the ball was held at a lopsided angle. The leather *thooped!* from his shoe and took off clear of the outstretched Giant hands. But Jimmy saw it veer crazily to the left of the uprights for a sickening miss.

The groan that went up from the Card supporters sucked the breath out of Jimmy. Here they'd seen him fail in another department which was supposed to be just his dish. With the 7 to 6 score remaining unchanged, Jimmy strode to the truck-like Farbin, said, "I knew you wanted me out of the game, but I didn't think you'd stoop to that!"

Farbin's lips peeled back with, "Can I help it if you can't kick straight?"

Jimmy well knew he could prove nothing, so he stood there, torn with the yen to trade knuckles with this red-headed tormentor. Still, he recognized that were he to fight with Farbin, the two of them would be instantly yanked from the game. And Jimmy had yet to prove his worth as a pro footballer today.

"I'll make friends with the gang in spite of you," Jimmy said.

Farbin's face went harder. He lowered his voice. "I'd make somethin' outta that," he said, "except that I gotta stay in this game to make sure *you* don't make the grade."

And now the officials in the jail-house stripes were motioning for the players to take their positions for the new kick-off. Farbin turned and went up field. Jimmy did likewise, his ears buzzing with the razzes f. o. b. bleachers.

The ball got into play again with Farbin doing the kicking. The two elevens tangled into each other, spreading men on the field as though they'd been machine-gunned. The Giant ball carrier was downed on his own forty-seven.

Up close now where the play could be heard and felt, Jimmy was satisfied that the Cards weren't hitting nearly as hard as they had when he'd been on the bench.

Positions, signals and another play. Jimmy went in with the snap of the ball. And what he saw of his team mates' tackling, told him they were deliberately soldiering on the job. On the next two plays he saw more of their halfhearted efforts as the Giants gobbled up yardage. None of the Cards defense was the real McCoy; none of it on the level.

His teammates' lethargy brought on exactly what Jimmy had feared. A substitute halfback came racing in to replace him.

If this is big time, Jimmy thought bitterly as he left the field, *they can have it!*

COACH STROHM met him at the sideline stripe with, "Kid, my own players've got me by the ears on a downhill pull. They hold their punches when you're in there—an' they know I can't fire a whole team in midseason."

"We don't work that way in the bushes," Jimmy said.

"I know, kid, I know." Strohm had a lost look in his eyes. "It—it's just that these old guys want me to believe they can't work with you." He rested an arm on Jimmy's shoulder, walked him back to the bench.

Jimmy had the embarrassment of helplessly sitting there and watching the Card players once again play like demented demons. They went on to win a 20 to 7 game—without him.

In the locker room all he got from the Card players was the backs of their necks. The times he tried to strike up a conversation with them, he was repaid only with unintelligible grunts, vague answers.

"Fatso" Starr, the regular Card center who'd been away with injuries, came waddling into the locker room. He shook hands all around, caught their ribbing about his new clothes, his new weight, his absence from the roster. In a little, he introduced himself to Jimmy.

Jimmy said, "I've read about you often, Starr, when I was on the West Coast."

"'Fatso's' my moniker around here, kid," the portly man said. "Hope you're beginnin' to like it in these parts."

Jimmy felt like telling him the facts, but thought better of it. Why sound like a cry baby?

They hit it off nicely as Jimmy went on with his dressing. This sudden friendliness from one of the Card regulars made Jimmy choke up with silent thanks.

Not till Jimmy headed for the showers did Fatso Starr return to the company of some of his old teammates. When Jimmy was finally showered and dressed, he turned to find all the club members prepared to go to Farbin's apartment to attend a party.

"Everybody invited?" Jimmy asked Coach Strohm, to make sure whether or not he'd be in order in joining them.

He saw color creep up Strohm's neck, into his face. And then the stammering words: "W-well, kid, it—it seems the guy only extended his invite to certain ones..."

"I'm not wanted?"

"Oh, it isn't that, boy. It's just that—well, Farbin don't warm up to people easy. You'll win him over..."

Jimmy didn't want to go hat in hand to win anyone over; not the Farbins, anyhow. He finished pack-

ing his grip as Strohm moved away, plainly embarrassed.

"Look, Travis," came a voice over Jimmy's shoulder. "Let's you an' me beat this party an' have our own."

"Our own?" Jimmy turned, looked up into the big flat face of center Starr.

"Yeah, kid. Let's hit a night spot. I know a couple where we can relax with a laugh or two."

Jimmy thought about this thing. Anything would be better than sitting around feeling sorry for himself. Maybe Fatso Starr's friendship for him would make the others sit up and take notice. Maybe through this happy-go-lucky center, Jimmy could win over the whole team. Maybe a lot of things...

"I'm for it," Jimmy said in a voice that was not quite his own.

CHAPTER III

WITHIN the hour the two of them were at the swank Crane Club where they took on several highballs, then some fancy groceries. Jimmy told himself he wasn't going to look like a country yahoo in this big timer's eyes. He wished he could cultivate some of the man's easy and carefree ways.

"I know what your problem is," the older man confided. "You're tight with worry over the deal the oldtimers are slippin' you. Forget it. Relax. They'll respect you for it."

Later, Fatso Starr took him up to the card room on the mezzanine. "A little poker," he said. "Small stakes—but a pack of fun, an' a sweet way to loosen up nerves."

Jimmy appreciated Fatso's interest in him. Here was a fellow who could make him really one of the Cards. They stuck in the game for two hours, with Jimmy playing his cards close to his chest. He was out only eighteen dollars when they pulled away, and Jimmy felt it was worth it. At least, Starr would now be recognizing him as a man—not a kid.

They didn't turn into their hotel till sparrow squeak. Jimmy was glad the team was playing home games this month, for it allowed the players to live in their respective homes

or separate hotels—thus avoiding any routine check-up by Strohm.

Practice on the field this day was less of an ordeal for Jimmy. Starr was now working at his old role of center again, and that helped. Again and again, he either slapped Jimmy on the back for good work, or had a word of encouragement for him. Even big left half Tidball tossed him a knowing smile. Judging from the glances of some of the other Cards, Jimmy was sure that they knew he had spent a night out with the laughing, ribbing center. That helped, too.

Scrimmage under the watchful eye of Coach Strohm became a rugged thing. Skull practice in the gymnasium was tough, too. At the end of the day, Strohm said to Jimmy, "You've got a pack of savvy, kid. Keep it up. You looked like the makin's today."

All of it made Jimmy feel more than ever indebted to Fatso Starr for the latter's friendship and guidance.

"Jimmy," Fatso said that evening, "we'll get more relaxation again tonight."

In the face of how well he had worked out this day, Jimmy had no idea of saying no. The two of them duplicated their time of the night before. Jimmy finished up with thirty-three dollars to the good. Again he'd played his cards cagily, had fun, and was prideful over the interest this big leaguer was taking in him. Surely it would give him stature in the eyes of the other Cards. The only hitch lay in the fact that he was fearfully weary when he turned in this time.

The following day's practice was again something of a winner. Jimmy threw well, caught well, ran the ball well. All this in spite of his team mates still working against him. But he found the effort greater; greater because there was a terrible tiredness in his legs and arms.

"Fatso," he confided, "I need a lot of catching up on shut-eye."

"You'll get adjusted to it," Starr came back.

Each day and night that week went

the same way. Practice chores got tougher because they were pointing for the big Sunday game with the Stars. Jimmy had less and less desire to go to the night club each night, but he didn't want to look like a patsy to Fatso.

"What do you do for sleep?" Jimmy asked him.

"Forget it, Jimmy," Fatso said. "After awhile, it's surprisin' how little you can get along on."

THE BIG Sunday game got under way. Coach Strohm didn't start Jimmy, but he did put him in early. And, although the Card players made no apparent effort to work along with him, Jimmy managed to resemble all the advance notice on him. He scooped up a Star fumble on his own thirty and ran it clear to pay dirt. At another point he intercepted a Star pass on their forty-five and again hauled the mail for a big 6—plus the ball game.

Now he was sure Starr's friendship was paying handsome dividends. Another week ensued with Fatso taking him to a different club; one where the stakes were higher. But Jimmy was playing smarter poker now under Fatso's tutelage, so he was making a fistful of dollars each time.

However, that didn't help any with his fatigue. Tiredness was a constant companion of his now. He couldn't decide whether the tiredness was better or worse than the everlasting tightness he had when he first began with this outfit. All he hoped for sure was that Fatso's interest in him still inspired him. The center's kindness was like a plank to a drowning man.

The following Saturday game with the Bulls was something of a replica of the Star game. Again Jimmy got into the game for but short duration—and again he intercepted an opposition pass, running it for a touchdown. As previously, the Card players went lackadaisical the moment Strohm sent Jimmy Travis onto the field. For the first time, Jimmy was glad that he was in the game so short awhile. The few plays he'd been in

left him heavy-footed, sluggish.

When he came off the field, he tried to run like the gazelle he had been for that last long sprint. He wanted to keep Strohm from seeing his tiredness. But even this off-the-field trot may not have fooled the coach. Jimmy wondered about the way Strohm looked at him with those all-knowing, blue eyes.

Jimmy's worry only increased when Strohm spoke to him in the locker room. "Better be right for the night game next Sunday. It's the big one with the Indians."

Jimmy just nodded and looked away.

He cut down on his card playing that week. Took no drinks. All this in spite of Fatso Starr. But much of the sluggishness remained.

Taxiing over to the stadium Sunday night with Starr, Jimmy confided, "I've been dead on my legs here of late, Fatso. No fire, no paprika."

Starr squeezed Jimmy's shoulder, said, "It's because you're still tryin' to be the picture player—stewin' about perfect form. Be loose out there. Make out you're playin' in a sandlot league."

Strohm started Jimmy at right half for this game. The sports writers had clamored to see more of him. All of it had Jimmy drawn with worry for fear he'd be found shy on endurance if he were required to play a full sixty minutes of tough ball.

THE INDIANS were rawboned hatchetmen who thrived on warfare. They threw smashing attacks through center such as Geronimo might have thought up. End-arounds and sweeps whirled in with the impact of well-planned massacres. The few times Jimmy had the ball, he found his blockers non-existent. Again and again he was buried hip-deep under Indian tacklers. As the game wore on, he found the coil springs were no longer in his arms or legs.

Relief and shame were jumbled in his heart when substitute Duarte came running into replace him. Jimmy

my, went into the bench, hoping that Strohm would appreciate that the Cards had offered him no cooperation at all. But, no, the coach's face was set, his words brittle.

"You're through, kid," Strohm said. "Big league ball calls for more than you showed today."

Jimmy wanted to cry out, "Hold on, Coach! What about your men giving me no help? I was playing two teams out there..." But the idea of offering an alibi went against all his principles and gave him momentary lockjaw.

He stuck on the bench, hoping, trusting that Strohm might give him one more try. But it never happened. It didn't happen because, the instant Jimmy was benched, the Card footballers started playing hard, tight, fast ball.

Not till Jimmy was in the locker room did Coach Strohm broach the subject again. "We're takin' on an old-timer in your place," he said. "Len Gebhardt, who retired to private business two years ago—then lost his shirt."

Jimmy remembered having read about the former great All-American fullback who had given the Cards six magnificent years of professional services. He also recollected having read that the former star wanted to get back into organized football to recoup his losses.

"I wish him luck," Jimmy said, trying to look the part of a good loser.

Strohm went on, "You can pick up a little dough—an' a little more experience—by stringin' along with us for awhile as a reserve."

"To help break Gebhardt in?"

"Well, that's part of the idea. But we'll need you mostly in scrimmage practice."

Just a tackling dummy, thought Jimmy. Still, he clung to the thought that this might prove his one last chance to get back into the regular lineup. Jimmy choked back his pride. "I'll stick around a little," he said. "I need the money."

Owner Mills arranged to pay Jimmy a weekly salary for playing on the B team against the regulars.

Practice scrimmage was stressed because the league-leading Panthers were invading the Card hometown two weeks hence. The winner of this one would certainly go on to be crowned national football potentate.

Monday morning found the entire Card squad on the practice field. Jimmy was in his halfback spot on the B team, prepared to make it interesting for all opposing blockers, tacklers and ball toters.

SOMEHOW, he had the feeling that the team's animosity toward him had lessened somewhat now that he had been demoted and was on the way out. He was thinking about just this when the A team threw its first play against the B's. From his spraddled position with the B's, Jimmy saw Farbin go into the slot on the single-wing formation. It looked very much like the old power play, and Jimmy boiled to break it up.

But it wasn't the power play. Quarterback Maas took the ball from center Starr, and lateralled to the right half Gebhardt. Sucked into the wrong spot, Jimmy felt silly as he slipped to his knees in trying to reverse his rush. Gebhardt made all of twenty yards before the B fullback stopped him.

Ambling back to his position at the end of the play, Jimmy stole a quick glance toward the bench, saw Coach Strohm looking his way. *Not so good*, thought Jimmy. Well, he'd figure faster on the next one—and hit hard when he did hit. Anything to make up for that first sloppy try.

Positions, signals and a snapped ball. Jimmy broke to his left, sensing a pass play to that side. Sure enough, Farbin passed on the dead run to the scrapping veteran, Gebhardt, who went up in a moil of men thirty yards away and hooked onto it. At a ten-yard distance, Jimmy went into a lashing swan dive, arms outstretched. He hit oncoming Gebhardt with the shock of a runaway horse.

It got dark a little before it got light again for Jimmy. And when he staggered up to his feet, he was astonished to find players standing

around the still prone Gebhardt. Jimmy went to him instantly, kneeled at his side.

Doc Strand and Coach Strohm came rushing onto the field. A few seconds of inspection and Doc said, "Hmmm, Len's collected himself a bad hip. He'll be laid up for awhile...."

That's when Jimmy Travis could have sold out for a fistful of turf. He felt all eyes upon him. Accusing eyes; particularly those of Strohm's.

Farbin walked away with, "Well, that's one way for a slob to get his job back."

Jimmy started for the fullback. Quickly, Strohm held him with restraining hands. "No sense in that, kid. Show your good will by holdin' down Gebhardt's job till he mends."

With anger still welling in his throat, Jimmy managed to say, "Count on me, Coach."

Jimmy got through that day of practice. And the next and the next. But he had to take it from his team mates now in a way such as he hadn't known before. They were positive that he had deliberately crippled Gebhardt.

Meantime, the injured halfback reviewed everyday's practice from the bench and showed no malice toward Jimmy. "Happens in the best of families, kid," he said on several occasions. And Jimmy learned to like the quiet man with the thinning hair. So much so that when he learned through Strohm that the Gebhardt family was in need, he offered Len money to tide him over. Len Gebhardt would have none of it, declined with thanks.

Jimmy continued to have his nights out with Fatso Starr. He reasoned that as long as he was being dumped, he might as well have one man here in the East who would speak of him as something other than small time. But lack of sleep continued to raise Cain with Jimmy's metabolism.

CHAPTER IV



ON THE DAY of the Panther game, Gebhardt still wasn't quite ready to take over his

old position at right half. Strohm put Jimmy in the veteran's spot. Also, the coach made a proclamation to the Cards in their dressing room.

"You've got to accept Jimmy for this one game," he commanded. "It isn't his fault that young players are a threat to your jobs."

The coach caught no back talk, but there were muttered grumbles, there were growls. And Jimmy felt every bit of it go into him like a knife. But none of it kept him from taking Coach Strohm to one side and saying, "My salary and bonus for today's game goes to Len. Will you deposit it to his account for me?"

Strohm smiled at him. "That the way you want it?"

Jimmy nodded. "I'm the cause of his being on the bench. What's more, he's a sweet guy; never once blamed me for that crippling tackle I threw at him...."

"You understand, of course, kid," Strohm went on, "this is your last game with us? Gebhardt will be fit to take over his own chores after this one."

"Yes, I know it." Jimmy cleared his throat. "One more thing, Coach. Please don't tell the gang my check goes to Len. I don't want them to think I'm trying to buy my way into their respect."

"Okay, kid. You're the doctor."

At the tunnel's end, just before Jimmy ran onto the field, Strohm had a last word with him. "Something's got into you, Jimmy boy. Looks like you've been tryin' to be the swashbucklin' type here of late. Suppose now you go out there an' give us the old picture player you were in California...."

Jimmy nodded that he'd try, then hearing his name blatted over the loudspeaker, broke for the gridiron.

As he went to his spot in the starting lineup, his eyes swept the jam-packed stadium which fanned around him. How he wished that buzzing mob would greet him as he'd been greeted time and again out on the West Coast. The sun was swallowed up behind clouds that looked like dirty bandages—and Jimmy felt the same way inside.

A whistle trilled. Jimmy looked downfield. A blue jerseyed Panther loped forward. Jimmy saw the arc of the man's kicking right leg propel the football high and far this way. The mob's voice rose with it. Panthers and Cards both wanted today's crucial game. The rest of the schedule would be a lead pipe cinch by comparison.

JIMMY moved easily, watched the ball tumble down into the arms of fullback Farbin. Jimmy joined the other halfback and gave Farbin the kind of protection a runner always hopes for, but seldom gets. Downfield they sped, until Jimmy took out one roaring tackler. At that point, Farbin reversed his field, cut diagonally for the other side. He was suddenly hit by two powerhouse Panthers and dumped with a leathery thud.

More plays, more desperate tries for yardage. Passes, line bucks, sweeps. For the whole first half the two teams blasted back and forth with neither of them being able to score. Again and again they knocked at each other's goal line, but always was there a last ditch stand that withstood the attack.

Between feeling dead-legged for want of sleep, plus being depressed over his failure as a big leaguer, Jimmy couldn't whip his spirit up into anything of the fighting form he had shown in the past. *It's my last big time game, his brain kept telling him, and my number is up, anyway....* He just couldn't get his heart into the game.

At the between-halves session in the locker room, Strohm walked Jimmy to the far end of one of the locker aisles. The coach's manner was grave. "Kid, you're playin' sloppy ball out there. Where's all that perfect form you had? You were a great prospect when you were a perfectionist."

Jimmy felt the bite of Strohm's tool-steel, penetrating gaze. He dropped his eyes. "It's hard to get hyped up, Coach, when a fella knows he's slated for the ash heap, anyhow."

Both Strohm's gnarled hands came out to Jimmy's shoulder pads. "Look, where's your pride? The least you can do is go out like a big leaguer!"

Jimmy studied the coach again. His voice came thin, thoughtful. "M-maybe I owe that much to myself...." He thought again about other young players who would give an arm for a shot at big time. "Coach, are you starting me in the second half?"

"What do you think?" came Strohm's answer. And Jimmy recognized that that tilted smile signified a green light.

The beginning of the second half found the crowd still yammering over this tight, scoreless game. Jimmy meant to give the balance of the game all he had—as long as his now wobbly legs would hold up. At least, he wouldn't let the celebrated veteran Gebhardt, think Jimmy Travis was losing his job on account of lying down.

The Cards' long kick-off went clear to the Panther end zone, but a big, bulky back ran it out to the nineteen before a swarm of Cards smothered him.

On the first play from scrimmage, the Panther quarterback faded, shot a quick screen pass that Farbin batted into the air. Charging in, Jimmy picked it as if he were taking wash off the line. He was downed fast on the twenty, and—just as fast—the pattern of the crowd-noise changed in his favor. The fans must have seen something of the super-charged madman in his scrambling now.

THERE WAS a quick huddle, then a quicker lineup with signals snapping on the crisp air. The ball was centered to Maas. Farbin drove ahead, with Maas faking him the ball. Through came Jimmy like a storm, straight at that wall of Panthers. He wheeled sharply, veered off to the right around the huge pile, where he trapped Maas's bullet pass and slammed into the end zone. There wasn't a good voice left in the stands.

Jimmy's churning, smashing drive

for a score must have got into the veins of the rest of the Cards. Maybe they were a little overawed at his still trying to punch out a win in spite of their having worked against him. They now lined up for the try at conversion with a new attitude, a new gusto.

Above the roar of the stands, Jimmy heard one of his team mates say, "Sweet goin', Jimmy!" Somebody else said, "Ol' sparkplug Jimmy Travis!" And someone else just slapped him on the fanny in passing. Jimmy didn't check to see who was paying him homage; it was enough that some of them were changing. He felt that the rest might take fire, too. He got to thinking of the times today when Card players had been temporarily benched. He remembered now that he had seen Strohm talking to them individually as if he were their father confessor—and it hadn't appeared like football talk....

Jimmy's question was suddenly answered when Farbin pressed close in the huddle, said, "Look, kid, you're not gonna give *all* your day's dough to Gebhardt. Each of us is givin' fifty percent of the day's earnin's to the guy. Get that?"

Jimmy knew then that Strohm had spilled the beans. "Okay," he grinned. "Fifty percent then...."

"Let's git to gittin'!" somebody yelled, snapping Jimmy out of his awe. He rushed to his position, reborn.

Maas caught the centered ball, placed it on end. Jimmy's toe went into the porkhide with a *thunk!*—but here a Panther forward lunged in, slapped the ball back into Jimmy's face. A half ton of grimy footballers piled high on Jimmy and the ball.

It stopped the score at 6-0, Card's favor.

Both teams went into position for the kick-off. Jimmy's boot went deep, bouncing close to coffin corner. A pounding Panther snared it, tightroped the sideline stripe for long yardage. Frantically, Cards cut diagonally. Farbin got close, missed a blistering tackle. Starr almost

reached him on the forty, but was smeared by a blocker. The ball totter was over the twenty-five, past the fifteen, the five. And there Jimmy hit him like a falling safe, skidding the two of them into the end zone. It was 6-6.

The point-after-touchdown attempt was made in a vacuum of tense silence. A snapped ball from center, with the Panther line holding like a barbed wire fence. The kick spun gracefully over the bars, and the Panthers were out in front with 7-6.

Jimmy went back to his deep right half spot to wait for the kick-off. In spite of the score, there was a warm glow beginning to expand in his innards. He felt now that he couldn't miss. This new fierce spirit of his team mates, and the camaraderie that went with it!

The ball came down deep, way to Jimmy's left. Then it bounded crazily and went out on the fifteen-yard marker. A sub lineman came in from the Card bench to give latest orders. More staccato signals, more lurching, smashing men. Ripping and tearing inside the tackles, with Farbin and Jimmy doing the carrying, they hammered their way up to the fifty-yard stripe. A steaming drive.

THE PANTHERS sensed that this young halfback phenom from the West was coming into his own, so they started covering him like a coat of shellac. Once he was almost in the clear on a tricky reverse from a pivot, but they knocked him down and tromped on him.

Jimmy got up, still feeling good about it; tired but good, for he knew his team mates were all showing the charge of 12-cell batteries—and that was good. It meant that he was in all right with them. Now he was enjoying the game—even more than he had when in college. Playing for dollars instead of hollers was meaning something to him. For the time being, he forgot that this was his last big league game.

Between Farbin and Jimmy, they worked the ball clear down to the Panther two-yard line. At that point, on fourth down, Maas called a play

where Jimmy could be the golden knight of the afternoon. Jimmy went wide like a coursing fox chased by hounds, picking his way. He took a spot pass from Farbin, turned—but someone missed an assignment and failed to dig a hole for Jimmy at that point. One Panther had him.

Jimmy dove, trying to take the big man with him. Others were on him now in whirling dives. He got a blurred glimpse of the goal line under his feet, then he was buried by the churning cats. But, smothered here in the turf, he wondered if he'd made it. The referee dug down to him, got the ball. Jimmy rolled over, saw the official make a rolling motion with his hand, and then point dramatically downfield. The Cards had not made it.

Center Fatso Starr stepped up to Jimmy, said something which he could not hear, because 70,000 people were going daft in the stadium. It was the end of the third quarter, and Jimmy saw Starr go out of the game, his injuries once more acting up on him.

With the ball going over to the Panthers, the frantic invaders got off a kick downfield that once again set the Cards back on their heels. At that point, both teams went into a punting war. With the wind behind them, the Panthers gained repeatedly on the kick exchanges.

CHAPTER V

THE CARDS were the first to retreat from the punting duel. Then the game worked into a tight pattern with the Panthers sweating to protect their one-point margin lead, and the hometowners bleeding to get within knocking distance of that enemy goal post. A rocking, socking game.

The pace was taking its toll; particularly from Jimmy who needed about forty-eight hours of solid sleep to restore him to his pristine glory. Time and again on running plays, he just didn't have the necessary swift. He felt that he could still kick a ball with accuracy, but this running, blocking, tackling...

Unh-uh! He was unraveling at the seams—and knew it.

Wait! Somebody else must know it. Jimmy turned to see his replacement, Duarte, running in and reporting to the official.

When Jimmy got to the bench, Strohm said in a low voice, "Sid-down."

Jimmy sat at his side, knew that the sudden harshness stemmed from something the coach had just learned. He waited for further words, vacantly manhandling his helmet.

"I sent Fatso to the showers," Strohm said. "He's in a bad way. His playin' days are back of him."

"I'm sorry for him," Jimmy said, knowing there was more to come.

Strohm went on, "There's only three minutes more to go in this shindig, an' you ain't got no more run in you."

Embarrassed, Jimmy said, "Oh. I can go some more."

"Not right now you can't." Strohm looked hard at him. "Thanks to your carousin' around at night when you should be in the sack..."

Jimmy turned his eyes to the far end of the field, felt the hot-crimson creeping out into his ears.

Strohm continued, "Fatso just give me the facts about his tryin' to break you down so's you'd fail in big time."

The words made Jimmy's head swivel back to the coach.

"H-he—"

"Right. A couple my own players paid him a hundred bucks apiece to keep you out nights to get you outta condition. An', kid, he done a crackin' good job."

Jimmy tried to grasp the fact that Fatso Starr would stoop to such a thing. But now Strohm's words were breaking in on his thinking again.

"Look, there we are with that loaf of leather, way down on our own twenty-five. At that point right now you're a total loss to me. You've run outta gas."

And Jimmy knew the man was as right as a coffin corner kick. So he said nothing. In the interim, Strohm sent in a replacement for Farbin.

Big Farbin came rocking off the

field, lurched Strohm's way because the mentor was crooking a finger at him. Modulating his voice, Strohm said, "Farbin, your pal, Fatso, just give me all the data on your plans. Pretty scurvy, says I...."

Jimmy saw Farbin's face blanch. The man's mouth opened, worked spasmodically. But no words came out.

Strohm got up heavily, tiredly. "Farbin, you owe somethin' to Jimmy an' me." He pointed to the moil of men on the field. "You go back out there an' engineer our outfit close enough to them Panther goal posts for a field goal try."

Farbin turned toward Jimmy, swallowed, then looked back at Strohm. "Coach, we owe Jimmy an apology. You told some of the men about Jimmy's pledge to Gebhardt—an' the old grapevine's working fast. Why, I just learned about Jimmy myself...."

JIMMY GOT to his feet as Farbin started to turn back to him. But Strohm broke in fast with, "The hell with pretty speeches right now. Farbin, square accounts by struttin' your stuff out there at tailback...." And he sent the big man back into the game, this time to run their T formations.

Standing at Strohm's side, Jimmy watched Farbin take charge. He saw his team mates put out the kind of effort that had a soul in it. Hard, blistering play.

Farbin used Duarte as a rocket on line plunges. Tidball, left half, he used as a time bomb on explosive reverses. He hitched together two long passes and a nineteen-yard scamper by one of his ends which stopped on the Panther thirty. Two razzle-dazzle plays sizzled, sputtered, then went out. The players were beginning to look like broken Bataan-marchers.

But on third down, with less than a minute to go, Farbin finally got a lateral off to a Card wingman who made a miraculous catch and stumbled on down to the Panther five with the safety riding his shoulders.

It was an almost impossible angle

for a field goal, but it was good for a first down. Strohm took a quick appraising glance at Jimmy. "You still look rocky an' woozy to me," he said, then turned his attention back to the distant Card huddle. Without looking at Jimmy, he added, "At least, you can take credit for an assist here. You were the means of soupin' them up."

"I—I'm okay now," Jimmy said, hoping Strohm would shove him in. To be in on this winning touchdown would really be something. It would make him one of the Cards, as nothing else ever could.

First down started with some leg-erdemain back of the Card's battered forwards. Jimmy saw Farbin take the ball from center, hike his two steps to the right, then fade back a step and pitch one to Duarte over the line.

The crowd-roar hit a keening crescendo, then died, for there had been a whistle on the play. The Cards not only didn't have a touchdown, but a five-yard penalty was slapped on them for too much time. Dejectedly, they slogged along back of the officials to the ten-yard line. The Card fans were bludgeoned into sick silence.

Realizing now that the field goal angle was a little less impossible, Jimmy looked into Strohm's face for word to go in. It was evident that the mentor, too, was studying the dubious angle, but the way he shook his head and scowled was answer enough.

On the next play Farbin faked a pass out into the flat, then smashed around the Panther left end and went sprawling headforemost over the goal stripe. Again the high keening of the mob caught in its throat, for the official was signalling that there'd been backfield in motion on the part of the Cards. As the man docked the hometowners five yards more, a thunder of jeers rolled up from the stands.

"In you go, boy!" Strohm said to Jimmy. "Let's see that automatic toe."

REPLACING Duarte, Jimmy looked up at that goal post an-

gle, and he liked it even less than he had when on the bench. He wished Strohm were here on the field to appreciate what a stinker of an angle it really was. The wind, too, was something to buck. It had a twist and a *whoosh* to it....

Into the huddle they went, hard-breathing men listened, nodded, wet their lips. Then they were out of it, bending into position. With sorry chewing at his insides, Jimmy tried to picture himself sinking his toe into that leather and whumping the thing true and clear of the cross bar that now seemed absurdly far to his right.

Signals. The new center spiraled the ball back toward Farbin as twenty-two players sprang. A bad snap-back! It ricocheted off the shoulder of the crouching Farbin. The mob-noise welled. Electrified, Jimmy swept in, scooped up the ball in its crazy flight.

He had one glimpse of men tangling and plunging in his own back-field. Like a man with his pants on fire, Jimmy bolted forward. He saw clawing Panthermen converging, so he hip-swiveled, bucked, churned with his feet and plowed on. His cleats gobbled up one marker, then another. He leaped head-on into two Panther players blocking the last few inches to pay dirt. The thud was that of human bodies landing at the base of an elevator. A meaty, sodden *plop!*

But there'd been a little skid to it; not much, but a little. Maybe enough! And Jimmy lay there under the ponderous pile, thinking about it. The ball was still cuddled to his guts—but where was *he*? As the weight unpiled, he turned, looked up and saw the stripe-shirted official standing stiffly with both arms lamppost-straight in the air.

Jimmy understood then what the ear-splitting noise from the stands stood for. Now his team mates were helping him up, banging him on the back, squeezing his biceps. All of a sudden it was wonderful to his now groggy brain—and he thought it was a great way to go out of big league ball. The 12-to 7 score on the boards

made him want to kick a hole in the sky.

THE GUN had barked the end of the game, and Jimmy's eyes blurred up. He limped up to Strohm, said above the bedlam, "Thanks, Coach, for letting me have that last crack at it. Now I've got something to tell the gang back home...."

Card players were moving in from the field, stampeding to the bench like a sweating, panting buffalo herd. Hands on hips and feet spread, Strohm met them with, "Okay, so you're all fired up over this win. Well, I'll tell you what. Some of you guys are as through now as—"

They paid no heed to their coach's yabber. Instead, they grabbed Jimmy, lifted him high onto arms and shoulders, started a raucous march toward the locker rooms. "Travis for governor!" somebody kidded. "All-league half!" someone else yowled.

Tight with pride, Jimmy looked down from his high perch, saw Strohm being swallowed up amid the bulky jerseyed shoulders. "Jeeze, Coach!" he yelled. "All of a sudden I'm loved...."

Strohm was trying to make his way along with the babbling bunch, and he was hollering up to Jimmy, "Sure, you're loved by 'em, kid! Now that you've give 'em a win. I gotta contract in the office for you! But I'm cannin' the slobs who—"

Jimmy never did hear the rest of Strohm's words. Too many players and fans were down there, making the racket and clamor of berserk chimpanzees.

But one thing Jimmy was sure of as his team mates hauled him along; he knew that Coach Strohm would not be releasing many of these old-timers. No sir, not so long as they continued to work and sweat with rookie Jimmy Travis the way they had this last half.

As for replacing Starr and any others—well, Jimmy thought of the many young guys like himself who were eager, right and ready for a shot at this big league stuff. And that was the picture he liked best....

BEST SPORTS GEMS

Great moments in the **LIFE OF SPORTS STARS**

THREE OUTS— NOT ENOUGH!

IT'S A RARE thing these days when a pitcher strikes out three batters in one inning, but when he has to fan four to retire a side it becomes an oddity worth remembering. Facing the Louisville Colonels under the arcs last August 3, hurler Hoyt Wilhelm of the Minneapolis Millers walked the first batter in the game. Bearing down on the second hitter, Eddie Lyons, Wilhelm struck him out. Taft Wright, the veteran ex-Chicago White Soxer then with the Colonels, followed with a clean single, and runners were on first and third. The Minneapolis twirler then overpowered the clean-up man, George Wilson, to record his second strikeout. And then the nightmare started. Wilhelm slipped a third strike past Mel Hoderlein, the next batter, for what should have been the third out. Miller catcher Bob Brady let the ball get away for an error, and when the dust cleared, the runner on third had scored and there were men on first and second. The sixth man in the Louisville lineup—Dick Gernert—singled another run across, and Wilhelm finally locked the door by whiffing Allen Richter. The totals for the first half of the first inning were: two runs, two hits, one error, one walk and FOUR strikeouts. Louisville went on to win the game, 12-1.

Marv Karp

A GUY NAMED SMYTH

AMERICA'S welterweight, turned middle weight, Ray Robinson will deserve the movie soon to be made about his life, entitled "A Guy Named Smyth". Probably the most outstanding reason for his deserved film story is the fact he's considered to be the greatest fighter of our time.

Robinson, born Walker Smyth, has taken on all comers. His 1950 summer fight with Charley Fusari was equally outstanding because he turned his purse over to the Damon Runyon Cancer Fund.

While Americans did hear about Robinson, only a few have ever heard the name of Andrew Smyth of Scotland, who is likened to Robinson, except a movie will never be made of his life.

Smyth is considered to be the finest referee in the British Isles. He handles all the big fight matches, only he is never paid.

Instead of accepting his share of the gate receipts, Smyth turns the entire amount over to charity after the fights. In many years of being the third man in the ring, Smyth has never kept a farthing of his earned profits. Although not a boxer, he is considered to be the finest sport ever known to the British ring.

Seth Kantor

HOW KONSTANTY GOT CONSTANT

THERE WAS no doubt in the minds of baseball fans everywhere, the most outstanding relief pitcher of 1950 was Jim Konstanty, the tall, bespectacled right-hander of the Philadelphia Phillies.

The records showed he was the best relief pitcher in the history of the game. And when you stop to think that Konstanty, now 33, was a complete flop at the age of 31—a player who had miserably flunked two major league trials—his success is all the more remarkable.

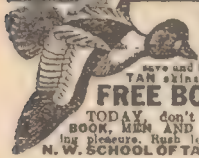
Konstanty relates that a friend of his in upstate New York is chiefly responsible for the sudden change. The friend's name is Andrew Skinner, an undertaker who had never so much as tried on a baseball glove until three winters ago. He consented to have a catch with Konstanty one day and then the miracle happened.

Skinner figured out, through mathematics, how the ball could dip and spin without speed if held a certain way. Konstanty tried it and the two worked on the pitch for many weeks.

It was that same palmed-slider, invented by a man who never played baseball, which brought the most belated success a pitcher has ever known in baseball.

Seth Kantor

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STAN WAS SHOTTON'S MAN

WHENEVER Stan Musial's booming bat turns the tide of a Cardinal-Dodger struggle in favor of the St. Louis Redbirds, Brooklyn Manager Burt Shotton has a double pill to swallow. Not only is he haunted by the memory of the defeat, but also by the remembrance that he is responsible for turning Musial into a slugger. The fateful incident occurred in the Cardinals' pre-season training camp at Hollywood, Fla., in 1941. Stan, then a pitcher, reported with a lame arm that had been hurt the previous season while he was playing with Daytona Beach in the Florida State League. Unable to throw very hard his first day out, Musial waited around to take a turn at bat. When Shotton, then manager of Columbus in the Cardinal chain, saw him swing, he advised the 20-year-old youngster to forget hurling and stick to hitting. Shotton then informed the St. Louis prexy, Branch Rickey, of his "find", and Musial was reclassified as an

oufielder. Sent to Springfield, Mo., at the start of the season, the six-foot Donora, Pa., clouter hit .379 in 87 games. The front office moved him up the minor league ladder to Rochester, and he batted .326 in 34 games. The next stop was the St. Louis Cardinals where he clubbed .426 in 12 games. In one season, Musial's sizzling warclub had changed him from a broken-down Class D pitcher into one of the National League's most feared sluggers.

Marv Karp

THE LONG RIDE BACK

JOCKEY BOBBY PURMANE was one of the country's leading jockeys a couple of seasons ago. One day he was thrown from his mount at Tropical Park, Florida. A herd of horses trampled over him before help could arrive.

Life dwindled from the little jockey as the doctors gave up hoping for his life. Months passed and Bobby's friends were surprised to see he had fought courageously back to a point where he would live. There was no hope of his mangled, twisted body ever moving again, to ride or walk, but miraculously enough he lived.

Then, the nation was further shocked to hear of Ben Hogan's similar recovery from a horrifying train-car crash. Not only that, but little Ben came back to the golf links he had ruled and this summer he amazed the world by winning the National Open Championship at Merion.

The news shot to all ends of the earth. Ben had completed one of the most sensational recoveries ever known to man.

Three weeks later, Bobby Purmane announced he would ride again. That news was too much to believe. But come back he did. And win again, he did. During the late summer session at Saratoga, Purmane was one of the top jockeys among the best in the nation.

When reporters flocked to find out what medicine was used by the little jockey, Purmane pulled out the records of Hogan's climb back through 1949 and 1950.

"The faith he had became my own," was the simple answer.

Seth Kantor

SPORTS BULL SESSION

ONE OF the most highly competitive occupations around these days is that of radio and TV baseball commentators. For the dough to be made, fame to be won, headaches to be inherited, that's the racket to try to squeeze into. The field, in general, threatens to yield as much security as a water-logged canoe in the middle of a Lake Michigan squall—but that's not enough from keeping sports-minded stentors from breaking down the walls of the big companies.

Talking about the airlines, it has been reported that Dixie Walker, the old Brooklyn Dodgers' "peepul's cherce" now making a living as a minor league manager, was set to move into a mike job alongside of Red Barber and the Catbird Seat. Some enterprising advertising execs, however, felt that the Flatbush Faithful were already getting an overdose of Dixieland phraseology from Barber, so the one-time unbeatable clutch hitter lost himself a job. So what did the Yanks do? They went ahead and hired that world citizen, Mr. Jay Hanna Dean—or Jerome Herman, who heard his first Bronx cheers from the lips of Missouri mules and Oklahoma coyotes.

Town and Country

In the tradition of sailors who go rowing during shore leaves and postmen who take hikes on their days off, many big-name basketball players keep in trim by playing in a summer circuit. The off-season mecca for many collegiate hoopsters is located deep in the heart of the Catskill Mountains, near Ellenville, N.Y. Teams, composed of the best basketsteers in the country, are sponsored by hotels in the area. To honor some of the greats who played for Tamarack Lodge, proprietor Dave Levinson has established a Basketball Hall of Fame. The first annual awards were presented last June to Max Zaslofsky, Sid Tanenbaum, George Kaftan and Bob Cousy. Zaslofsky is now a star with the Chi Stags. Tanenbaum was an all-time NYU ace, and Kaftan and Cousy were a great one-two punch at Holy Cross.

NET-NOTES:

One of the most over-looked tennis players in the country, until he massacred Jackie Kramer and Frankie Kovacs to

take the 24th annual national play-for-wampum championships at the Cleveland Skating club courts last June 11-12, was the South American hot dog, Pancho Segura. Now everybody who's interested in the net game is wondering just how long diminutive Francisco, the ex-Guayaquil, Ecuador, citizen, will remain Number One Guy. Until Pancho's ten-strike at Cleveland, he was simply low man on the pro totem pole in that marathon tour that billed Kramer and Pancho Gonzales in neon lights, and relegated Segura and his whipping boy, Frank Parker, to the also-ran ash heap. Segura quit the nation-wide grind in disgust because of his menial status, and "not enough monee", as he so colorfully describes it. The two-handed gamester gave the moguls a whole summer to think about new offers for his services while he went off to New York's Lake Kiamesha (Concord Hotel) to give tennis lessons to a rising generation of Pancho Segura fans. ...Talking about Segura, it is interesting to observe that able net pro, Elwood Cooke, who runs "celebrity house" tennis courts at Tudor City (NY), helped to bring Pancho to America. "When I helped arrange for Segura to come over to the States," reminisces Cooke, "he came with another Ecuadorian boy. The other fellow was just about the richest boy in Ecuador, and Pancho was about the poorest." Pancho is now apparently trying to rectify this differential.

* * *

Two of the biggest names in college football, Leon Hart of Notre Dame and the versatile Doak Walker of SMU, should help to give the Detroit Lions the best year they've ever had at the gate. The rumor-mongers are already at work predicting that large Leon will be a dismal failure with the pros, due to slowness afoot. Yet these same crystal-ballers anticipate Hart's being shifted to fullback by Bo McMillin. Makes little sense, but then what long-range grid prediction ever does? ...Little University of Dayton (Ohio) makes the consistent claim of housing the best all-around Hawaiian football player since hula-hips Herm Wodemeyer cavorted for St. Mary's. The boy's name is Leroy "The Hyphen" Ka-ne, a halfback who missed 11 quarters because of injury last year yet set a school mark of 72 points. He was All-Ohio, carried 99 times at 7.8 yards per carry. Ka-ne's full name-plate is: Leroy Peter Patrick Wailaahia Ka-ne. The Hawaiian part of his name means "King of the Waterfall". In the barefoot league, Flyers' observers rate him with Gordon Chung-Hoon, once a star at Navy.

The Editors

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